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Japan

7th Edition

by Beth Reiber with Janie Spencer

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Beth Reiber worked for several years in Germany as a freelance travel writer writing for major U.S. newspapers and in Tokyo as editor of the *Far East Traveler*. Now a freelance travel writer residing in Lawrence, Kansas, with her two sons, she's the author of several Frommer's guides, including *Frommer's Tokyo* and *Frommer's Hong Kong*, and is a contributor to *Frommer's Europe from \$70 a Day*, *Frommer's USA*, *Frommer's Southeast Asia*, and *Frommer's China*.

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Published by:

Wiley Publishing, Inc.

111 River St.
Hoboken, NJ 07030-5774

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ISBN 0-7645-4323-7

Editor: Kendra L. Falkenstein
Production Editor: M. Faunette Johnston
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Photo Editor: Richard Fox
Production by Wiley Indianapolis Composition Services

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Manufactured in the United States of America

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To my parents, who, while I was growing up in Kansas, always encouraged me to look farther than my own backyard.

—Beth Reiber

To Amanda, who helped me see a whole new Japan through a child's eye.

—Janie Spencer

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank some fine and very special people, without whose help this book would not be possible: Marian Goldberg, Ikuo Takahashi, and Kana Nomoto of the Japan National Tourist Organization for their years of support and hard work; Jun Oda, Junko Matsuda, Masumi Arakawa, Teru Nakanishi, Nobue Arai, Sumie Hirohara, Rie Maruo, Rie Tokura, Mamoru Matsuura, Takuya Morita, Keiko Hirano, Asuo Tamaki, Satoshi Hirono, Toshikazu Takechi, Takeuchi Chizuru, Emi Miura, Toru Fujiwara, and Shizue Ishibashi for their regional expertise and assistance; and Debbie Howard for her moral support. A special thanks goes to my sons, Matthias and Johannes, for putting up with my long absences for as long as they can remember.

—Beth Reiber

Without the generous help of the many who assisted me during my preparation, the comprehensive coverage in this edition would not have been possible. I would like to acknowledge in particular the kindness and hard work of Ikuo Takahashi and Kana Nomoto of the Japan National Tourist Organization, Toshifumi Ando of the JNTO Paris Office, Satoshi Watanabe of the Kagoshima Prefectural Tourist Federation, Tomoko Matsuo of the Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation, and Yoshihiko Nakagawa of the City of Osaka. I would also like to thank Keiko Kuromizu, Tamaki Ami, Mariko Tomonaga, Hiroko Fujioka, Yoshiro Ushida, Yuko Kitajima, and Noriko Konishi. Debbie Howard and Skip Cronin also provided valuable support.

—Janie Spencer

An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

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Suzy Gershman's Born to Shop Hong Kong, Shanghai & Beijing

Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **seven feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

-  **Find** Special finds—those places only insiders know about
-  **Fun Fact** Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **Kids** Best bets for kids, and advice for the whole family
-  **Moments** Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **Overrated** Places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **Tips** Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
-  **Value** Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express	DISC	Discover	V	Visa
DC	Diners Club	MC	MasterCard		

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- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

What's New in Japan

PLANNING YOUR TRIP TO JAPAN **Health & Safety** Fears of **mad cow disease** have receded after regulations stipulating that all slaughtered cows must be tested for the disease. Most restaurants specializing in beef that switched to other dishes following the initial scare have now resumed serving meat.

Internet Access Although the overwhelming majority of Japanese **web-sites** are in Japanese only, more and more are becoming bilingual. Most major cities now have English websites, as do many hotels and attractions. **Cybercafes** are also finally catching on and can be found in major cities across Japan. Some top hotels have installed in-room high-speed Internet connections, though those are still rare.

Getting Around Japan **Train reservations** for the Shinkansen bullet train and the Narita Express (which travels between Narita airport and Tokyo Station) can now be booked online at www.world.eki-net.com. After signing up for membership (free of charge), users can peruse timetables and fares and receive e-mail confirmation, which they then print out and present at ticket offices in Japan. Reservations can be made 1 month to 2 days prior to the train's departure. Holders of a Japan Rail Pass can also reserve seats in this way.

Speaking of rail passes, the new **Hokkaido Rail Pass** good for Japan's northernmost major island is now available for 3 days and costs ¥14,000

(\$117) for ordinary class and ¥20,000 (\$170) for first class. Unlike other Japan Rail Passes, which must be purchased before you enter Japan, it can also be bought in Hokkaido.

Boarding a Shinkansen bullet train bound for Kyoto, Hiroshima, and other points west is now easier in Tokyo with the October 2003 opening of **Shinagawa** as a station on the Tokaido-Sanyo line, a bonus for travelers wishing to avoid the huge and confusing Tokyo Station.

SETTLING INTO TOKYO **Visitor Information** Both the **Tourist Information Center (TIC)**, managed by the Japan National Tourist Organization) and the **Tokyo Tourist Information Center** (operated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government), have moved out of their expensive digs in the Tokyo International Forum to opposite ends of town. The TIC moved just a short distance away to rather cramped quarters on the 10th floor of the Tokyo Kotsu Kaikan Building at 2-10-1 Yurakucho (☎ **03/3201-3331**), while the Tokyo Tourist Information Center is now ensconced in Shinjuku on the first floor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building no. 1 (which also has a great free observatory on the 45th floor).

Tokyo's Neighborhoods Several Tokyo neighborhoods have undergone wide-scale makeovers, most notably Roppongi with its 11-hectare (28-acre) **Roppongi Hills** filled with offices, shops, restaurants, apartments, a hotel,

a sophisticated cinema complex, and an art museum. Other construction projects, all located near major train stations, are under way or have been completed on land auctioned off by Japan National Railways.

Getting Around Odaiba, a man-made island in Tokyo Bay and home to hotels, shopping complexes, several museums, and other attractions, can now be reached not only by the Yurikamome Line monorail but also by the **JR Saikyo Line** (18 min. from Shibuya) and the **Rinkai Line** from Osaki Station.

Where to Stay Although the local tax was abolished a couple years ago, Tokyo has since reinstated a **hotel tax** of ¥100 (85¢) per person per night for rates between ¥10,000 and ¥14,999 (\$83–\$125); and ¥200 (\$1.65) per night for rates of ¥15,000 (\$125) and up.

Several upper-end hotels have opened in the past 2 years. The exclusive **Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi**, 1–11–1 Marunouchi (☎ 800/322-3442), has a great location next to Tokyo Station. **Grand Hyatt Tokyo** is in Roppongi Hills (☎ 800/233-1234).

EXPLORING TOKYO Tokyoites no longer have to travel to Hakone or other out-of-town destinations to soak in hot springs with the opening of **Oedo-Onsen Monogatari** on Odaiba (☎ 03/5500-1126). Designed like bathhouses of yore, it features shops, restaurants, massage rooms, sand baths, indoor/outdoor baths, and saunas.

KYOTO The famed Miyako, open since 1890, has joined forces with Westin to become **The Westin Miyako**, Sanjo Keage in eastern Kyoto (☎ 800/WESTIN-1), and has undergone extensive renovations that have raised it to the sophisticated level of Tokyo hotels.

THE REST OF WESTERN HONSHU **Nagoya** Nagoya is gearing up to host the 2005 Expo with construction of a new airport on a man-made island. **Noritake Garden**, 3–1–36 Noritake Shinmachi (☎ 052/561-7114), has reopened after undergoing complete renovation in anticipation of its 100-year anniversary bash to be held in 2004.

Osaka **Festivalgate** has closed. Not far away, at **Shitennoji Temple** (☎ 06/6771-0066), there is a newly restored Japanese landscape garden that first opened to the public during the shogun era.

Several Osaka hotels have closed, including the **Holiday Inn Nankai** and the **DH Hotel**. The **Nankai South Tower Hotel Osaka** is undergoing change of management that will bring it under the Raffles helm.

Kobe Kobe's tragic 1995 earthquake is the focus of a new museum, the **Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution**, 1–5–2 Wakinhama Kaigan-Dori (☎ 078/262-5050), which covers the topic with graphic films, thought-provoking dioramas, and displays outlining the city's recovery and subsequent earthquake-prevention measures.

Other changes include construction of a **new airport** on Port Island slated to open in 2005; and the opening of one of my favorite chain hotels, **Toyoko Inn Kobe-Sannomiya**, 1–2–2 Miyukidori (☎ 078/271-1045), which offers such perks as free Internet access and free breakfast.

KYUSHU **Miyazaki** The Hotel Ocean 45 in the exclusive Seagaia resort area is now the **Sheraton Grande Ocean Resort** (☎ 800/325-3535).

Nagasaki Meanwhile, on the other side of Kyushu, **Huis Ten Bosch** (☎ 0956/27-0001), a re-created 17th-century Dutch village, had declared

bankruptcy at press time and was awaiting a buyer.

HOKKAIDO Sapporo Sapporo Station has finally finished lengthy reconstruction and now boasts two shopping malls, Daimaru department store, and a hotel. The **Sapporo Beer**

Company has closed its downtown brewery. Luckily, guided tours of the **Sapporo Beer Museum**, N7 E9 (☎ 011/731-4368), still take in part of the old brewery and, more importantly, end with samples of our favorite brew.

The Best of Japan

Hardly a day goes by that you don't hear something about Japan, whether the subject is trade, travel, scandal, natural disaster, cuisine, the arts, or the nation's worst economic recession since World War II. Yet Japan remains something of an enigma to people in the Western world. What best describes this Asian nation? Is it the giant producer of cars, computers, and a whole array of sleek electronic goods that compete favorably with the best in the West? Or is it still the land of the geisha and bonsai, the punctilious tea ceremony, and the delicate art of flower arrangement? Has it become, in its outlook and popular culture, a country more Western than Asian? Or has it retained its unique ancient traditions while forging a central place in the modern industrialized world?

In fact, Japan is an intricate blend of East and West. Its cities may look Westernized—often disappointingly so—but beyond first impressions there's very little about this Asian nation that could lull you into thinking you're in the West. Yet Japan also differs greatly from its Asian neighbors. Although it borrowed much from China in its early development, including Buddhism and its writing system, the island nation remained steadfastly isolated from the rest of the world throughout much of its history, usually deliberately so. Until World War II, it had never been successfully invaded; and for more than 200 years, while the West was stirring with the awakenings of democracy and industrialism, Japan completely closed its doors to the outside world and remained a tightly structured feudalistic society with almost no outside influence.

It's been just a little more than 136 years since the Japanese opened their doors, embracing Western products wholeheartedly, yet at the same time altering them and making them unquestionably their own. Thus, that modern high-rise may look Western, but it may contain a rustic-looking restaurant with open charcoal grills, corporate offices, a pachinko parlor, a high-tech bar with views of Mount Fuji, a McDonald's, an acupuncture clinic, a computer showroom, and a rooftop shrine. Your pizza may come with octopus, beer gardens are likely to be fitted with Astroturf, and "parsley" refers to unmarried women older than 25 (because parsley is what's left on a plate). City police patrol on bicycles, garbage collectors attack their job with the vigor of a well-trained army, and white-gloved elevator operators, working in some of the world's swankiest department stores, bow and thank you as you exit.

Because of this unique synthesis of East and West into a culture that is distinctly Japanese, Japan is not easy for Westerners to comprehend. Discovering it is like peeling an onion—you uncover one layer only to discover more layers underneath. Thus, no matter how long you stay in Japan, you never stop learning something new about it—and to me that constant discovery is one of the most fascinating aspects of being here.

1 The Best Travel Experiences

Long ago, the Japanese ranked the “three best” of almost every natural wonder and attraction in their country: the three best gardens, the three best scenic spots, the three best waterfalls, even the three best bridges. But choosing the “best” of anything is inherently subjective, and decades—even centuries—have passed since some of the original “three best” were so designated. Still, lists can be useful for establishing priorities. To help you get the most out of your stay, I’ve compiled this list of what I consider the best Japan has to offer based on our many combined years of traveling through the country. From the weird to the wonderful, the profound to the profane, the obvious to the obscure, these recommendations should fire your imagination and launch you toward discoveries of your own.

- **Making a Pilgrimage to a Temple or Shrine:**

From mountaintop shrines to neighborhood temples, Japan’s religious structures rank among the nation’s most popular attractions. Usually devoted to a particular deity, they’re visited for specific reasons: Shopkeepers call on Fushimi-Inari Shrine outside Kyoto, dedicated to the goddess of rice and therefore prosperity, while couples wishing for a happy marriage head to Kyoto’s Jishu Shrine, a shrine to the deity of love. Shrines and temples are also the sites for most of Japan’s major festivals. See chapter 2, the regional chapters, and “The Best Temples & Shrines” section, below, for more on Japan’s temples and shrines.

- **Taking a Communal Hot-Spring Bath:**

No other people on earth bathe as enthusiastically, as frequently, and for such duration as the Japanese. Their many hot-spring resorts—thought to cure all sorts of ailments as well as simply

make you feel good—range from hangarlike affairs to outdoor baths with views of the countryside. No matter what the setup, you’ll soon warm to the ritual of soaping up, rinsing off, and then soaking in near-scalding waters. See “The Best Spas & Public Baths,” later in this chapter, for specific recommendations.

- **Participating in a Festival:** With Shintoism and Buddhism as its major religions, and temples and shrines virtually everywhere, Japan has festivals literally every weekend. These celebrations, which range from huge processions of wheeled floats to those featuring horseback archery and ladder-top acrobatics, can be lots of fun; you may want to plan your trip around one. See the “Calendar of Events,” in chapter 2 for a list of some of the most popular Japanese festivals.

- **Dining on Japanese Food:**

There’s more to Japanese cuisine than sushi, and part of what makes travel here so fascinating is the variety of national and regional dishes. Every prefecture, it seems, has its own style of noodles, its special vegetables, and its delicacies. If money is no object, order *kaiseki*, a complete meal of visual and culinary finesse. See the “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style” section of chapter 2, the “Where to Dine” sections in the regional chapters, and “The Best Culinary Experiences,” later in this chapter, for more on Japanese food.

- **Viewing the Cherry Blossoms:**

Nothing symbolizes the coming of spring so vividly to the Japanese as the appearance of the cherry blossoms—and nothing so amazes visitors as the way the Japanese gather under the blossoms to celebrate the season with food,

drink, dance, and karaoke. See the “Calendar of Events,” in chapter 2 for cherry blossom details.

- **Riding the Shinkansen Bullet Train:** Asia’s fastest train whips you across the countryside at more than 290km (180 miles) an hour as you relax, see the country’s rural countryside, and dine on boxed meals filled with local specialties of the area through which you’re speeding. See “Getting Around Japan,” in chapter 2 for more.
- **Staying in a Ryokan:** Japan’s legendary service reigns supreme in the ryokan, a traditional Japanese inn. Staying in a ryokan is the height of both luxury and simplicity: You’ll bathe in a Japanese tub, dine like a king in your own room, sleep on a futon, awaken to lovely views (usually a Japanese garden) past the shoji screens, and breakfast in your room to start the day. See “Tips on Accommodations,” in chapter 2 and the “Where to Stay” sections in the regional chapters for more on ryokan.
- **Shopping in a Department Store:** Japan’s department stores are among the best in the world, offering everything from food to designer clothing to electronics to kimono and traditional crafts. Service also is among the best in the world: If you arrive when the store opens, staff will be lined up at the front door to bow as you enter. See the “Shopping” sections throughout this book.
- **Attending a Kabuki Play:** Based on universal themes and designed to appeal to the masses, Kabuki plays are extravaganzas of theatrical displays, costumes, and scenes—but mostly they’re just plain fun.

See “Cultural Snapshots: Japanese Arts in a Nutshell,” in appendix A and the Kabuki section of “Tokyo After Dark,” in chapter 4.

- **Strolling Through Tokyo’s Nightlife District:** Every major city in Japan has its own nightlife district, but probably none is more famous, more wicked, or more varied than Tokyo’s Kabuki-cho in Shinjuku, which offers everything from hole-in-the-wall bars to strip joints, discos, and gay clubs. See “Tokyo After Dark,” in chapter 4.
- **Seeing Mount Fuji:** It may not seem like much of an accomplishment to see Japan’s most famous and tallest mountain, visible from 161km (100 miles) away. But the truth is: It’s hardly ever visible except during the winter months and rare occasions when the air is clear. Catching your first glimpse of the giant peak is truly breathtaking and something you’ll never forget, whether you see it from aboard the Shinkansen, from a Tokyo skyscraper, or from a nearby national park. If you want to climb it, be prepared for a group experience—600,000 people climb Mount Fuji every year. See “Climbing Japan’s Most Famous Mountain: Mount Fuji,” in chapter 5 for more information.
- **Spending a Few Days in Kyoto:** If you see only one city in Japan, Kyoto should be it. Japan’s capital from 794 to 1868, Kyoto is one of Japan’s finest ancient cities, boasting some of the country’s best temples, Japanese-style inns, traditional restaurants, shops, and gardens. See chapter 7 for extensive information on the city.

2 The Best Temples & Shrines

- **Sensoji Temple** (Tokyo): The capital’s oldest temple is also its liveliest. Throngs of visitors and

stalls selling both traditional and kitschy items lend it a festival-like atmosphere. This is the most

important temple to see in Tokyo. See p. 175.

- **Meiji Jingu Shrine** (Tokyo): Tokyo's most venerable and refined Shinto shrine honors the Emperor Meiji and his empress with simple yet dignified architecture surrounded by a dense forest. This is a great refuge in the heart of the city. See p. 175.
- **Kotokuin Temple** (Kamakura): This temple is home to the Great Buddha, Japan's second-largest bronze image, which was cast in the 13th century and sits outdoors against a magnificent wooded backdrop. The Buddha's face has a wonderful expression of contentment, serenity, and compassion. See p. 228.
- **Hase Kannon Temple** (Kamakura): Although this temple is famous for its 9m (30-ft.) tall Kannon of Mercy, the largest wooden image in Japan, it's most memorable for its thousands of small statues of Jizo, the guardian deity of children, donated by parents of miscarried, stillborn, or aborted children. It's a rather haunting vision. See p. 229.
- **Toshogu Shrine** (Nikko): Dedicated to Japan's most powerful shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, this shrine is the nation's most elaborate and opulent, made with 2.4 million sheets of gold leaf. It's set in a forest of cedar. See p. 234.
- **Kiyomizu Temple** (Kyoto): One of Japan's best-known temples with a structure imitated by lesser temples around the country, Kiyomizu commands an exalted spot on a steep hill with a sweeping view over Kyoto. The pathway leading to the shrine is lined with pottery and souvenir shops, and the temple grounds have open-air pavilions where you can drink beer or eat noodles. Don't neglect the smaller **Jishu Shrine** on its grounds—it's dedicated to the god of love. See p. 324.
- **Sanjusangendo Hall** (Kyoto): Japan's longest wooden building contains the spectacular sight of more than 1,000 life-size wood-carved statues, row upon row of the thousand-handed Kannon of Mercy. See p. 326.
- **Kinkakuji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion)** (Kyoto): Constructed in the 14th century as a shogun's retirement villa, this three-story pavilion shimmers in gold leaf and is topped with a bronze phoenix; it's a beautiful sight when the sun shines and the sky's blue. See p. 326.
- **Todaiji Temple** (Nara): Japan's largest bronze Buddha sits in the largest wooden structure in the world, making it the top attraction in this former capital. While not as impressive as the Great Buddha's dramatic outdoor stage in Kamakura (see above), the sheer size of Todaiji Temple and its Buddha make this a sight not to be missed if you're in the Kansai area. See p. 348.
- **Horyuji Temple** (Nara): Despite the fact that Todaiji Temple with its Great Buddha (see above) gets all the glory, true seekers of Buddhist art and history head to the sacred grounds of Horyuji Temple with its treasures and ancient buildings. See p. 346.
- **Ise Grand Shrines** (Ise): Although there's not much to see, these shrines are the most venerated Shinto shrines in all of Japan, and pilgrims have been flocking here for centuries. Amazingly, the Inner Shrine, which contains the Sacred Mirror, is razed and reconstructed on a new site every 20 years according to strict rules governing purification in the Shinto religion. Follow the age-old route of former pilgrims after you visit

the shrines, and stop for a meal in the nearby Okage Yokochō District. See p. 367.

- **Itsukushima Shrine** (Miyajima): The huge red *torii* (the traditional entry gate of a shrine) standing in the waters of the Seto Inland Sea is one of the most photographed landmarks in Japan and signals the approach to this shrine. Built over the tidal flats on a gem of an island called Miyajima, it's considered one of Japan's most scenic spots. At night, the shrine is illuminated. See p. 468.
- **Kotohiragu Shrine** (Kotohira, on Shikoku): One of Japan's oldest

and most popular shrines beckons at the top of 785 granite steps on the Yashima Plateau with great views of the Seto Inland Sea, but for most Japanese, it's the "I made it!" that counts. See p. 476.

- **Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine** (Fukuoka): Established in 905 to deify the god of scholarship, this immensely popular shrine has a festive atmosphere and is popular with students wishing to pass school exams. The road leading to the shrine is lined with souvenir and craft shops. See p. 496.

3 The Best Gardens

- **Hama Rikyu Garden** (Tokyo): Considered by some to be the best garden in Tokyo, this peaceful oasis has origins stretching back 300 years when it served as a retreat for a former feudal lord and as duck-hunting grounds for the Tokugawa shōgun. Surrounded by water on three sides, it contains a tidal pool, moon-viewing pavilions, and teahouses. See p. 183.
- **Sankei-en Garden** (Yokohama): Historic villas, tea arbors, a farmhouse, a pagoda, and other authentic buildings, all set in a century-old landscaped garden with ponds and streams, make this one of the most interesting and picturesque gardens in Japan. See p. 242.
- **Ryoanji Temple** (Kyoto): Japan's most famous Zen rock garden, laid out at the end of the 15th century, consists of moss-covered boulders and raked pebbles enclosed by an earthen wall. It is said that it's impossible to see all 15 rocks from any vantage point; see if you can. Come early in the morning for some peaceful meditation. See p. 326.
- **Katsura Imperial Villa** (Kyoto): Designed by Japan's most famous gardener, Kobori Enshū, the garden surrounding this imperial villa is, in my view, Japan's most beautiful. A "strolling garden," its view changes with every step but is always complete, perfectly balanced, and in harmony. It's well worth the extra effort involved to see it. See p. 336.
- **Saihoji** (Kyoto): Popularly known as the Moss Temple, Saihoji is Japan's most famous moss garden, with more than 100 varieties spread throughout the grounds, giving off an iridescent glow. It's especially beautiful after a rainfall. See p. 338.
- **Kenrokuen Garden** (Kanazawa): Considered by some to be Japan's grandest landscape garden (and rated one of the "three best"), Kenrokuen is also one of the largest. The garden took 150 years to complete and consists of ponds, streams, rocks, mounds, trees, grassy expanses, and footpaths. Best of all, no tall buildings detract from the views. After Katsura (see above), this is my top choice. See p. 376.

- **Koko-en** (Himeji): It isn't old (it was laid out in 1992), but this is a wonderful surprise package of nine small gardens, each one different but typical of gardens during the Edo Period, which lasted from 1603 to 1867. Upon seeing what can be accomplished with skill and money in little more than a decade, some gardeners may turn green with envy. See p. 428.
- **Korakuen Garden** (Okayama): Rated one of Japan's three most beautiful gardens, Korakuen was completed in 1700 and incorporates the surrounding hills and Okayama Castle into its design. It's definitely worth a visit if you're in the vicinity, though personally, I like Kenrokuen (see above) more. See p. 432.
- **Ritsurin Park** (Takamatsu): Dating from the 17th century, this former private retreat of the ruling Matsudaira clan is an exquisite strolling garden that incorporates Mount Shiun in its landscaping and boasts 1,600 pine trees and 350 cherry trees. Stop for tea in the Feudal-Era teahouse and contemplate the view at leisure. See p. 474.
- **Senganen** (Kagoshima): Laid out more than 300 years ago by the Shimazu clan, this summer retreat with a 25-room villa was known for its poem-composing parties, held beside a rivulet that still exists. After touring the garden and villa, be sure to visit the nearby museum with relics belonging to the Shimazu family. This garden is one of my favorites. See p. 518.

4 The Best Castles, Palaces & Villas

- **Matsumoto Castle** (Matsumoto): Popularly known as the Crow Castle due to its black color, this small castle boasts the oldest *donjon* (keep) in Japan (400 years old). A moon-viewing room was added in 1635, and exhibited inside the castle is a superb collection of Japanese matchlocks and samurai armor dating from the mid-16th century through the Edo Period. Volunteer guides stand ready for personal tours. See p. 262.
- **Kyoto Imperial Palace** (Kyoto): Home to Japan's imperial family from the 14th century to the 19th century, this palace is praised for its Heian design and graceful garden. Good news for travelers: Guided tours of the palace are free. See p. 321.
- **Nijo Castle** (Kyoto): One of the few castles built by the mighty Tokugawa shogunate as a residence rather than for defense, Nijo Castle is where the shogun stayed whenever he was in Kyoto. It's famous for its creaking floorboards that warned of enemy intruders. The castle is considered the quintessence of Momoyama architecture. See p. 322.
- **Katsura Imperial Villa** (Kyoto): Built in the 1600s by a brother of the emperor, this villa and garden are considered to be among the best—if not the best—in traditional architecture and landscape gardening. More than anywhere else, the villa illustrates the life of refinement enjoyed by 17th-century nobility, when leisurely pursuits included such activities as moon viewing. See p. 336.
- **Osaka Castle** (Osaka): Although just a reproduction of what was once the mightiest castle in the land, Osaka Castle still impresses with its sheer size. Inside you'll find a high-tech museum detailing the life and times of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the warrior general who built the castle. See p. 394.
- **Himeji Castle** (Himeji): Said to resemble a white heron poised in

flight over the plains, this is quite simply Japan's most beautiful castle. With its extensive gates, moats, turrets, and maze of passageways, it has survived virtually intact since feudal times. If you see only one castle in Japan, make it this one. See p. 427.

- **Matsue Castle** (Matsue): This 17th-century castle is one of Japan's few remaining original castles (not a reconstruction). It features a five-story donjon with samurai gear and artifacts belonging to the ruling Matsudaira clan. See p. 447.
- **Matsuyama Castle** (Matsuyama): Occupying a hill above the city,

this is also one of the few original castles left in Japan. It boasts good views over Matsuyama from its three-story donjon as well as a collection of armor and swords of the Matsudaira clan. See p. 482.

- **Kumamoto Castle** (Kumamoto): Although a ferroconcrete reconstruction not nearly as huge as the original, this massive castle is still an impressive sight, especially at night when it's illuminated. It's famous for its curved walls, which made invasion virtually impossible. The interior houses a museum with palanquins, armor, swords, and other artifacts of the former ruling clans. See p. 531.

5 The Best Museums

- **Tokyo National Museum** (Tokyo): Even professed museum-phobes should make a point of visiting the National Museum, the largest repository of Japanese arts in the world. Lacquerware, china, kimono, samurai armor, swords, woodblock prints, religious art, and more are on display, making this the best place in Japan to view Japanese antiques and decorative objects. If you visit only one museum in Japan, this should be the one. See p. 178.
- **Edo-Tokyo Museum** (Tokyo): Housed in a high-tech modern building, this ambitious museum chronicles the fascinating and somewhat tumultuous history of Tokyo (known as Edo during the Feudal Era) with models, replicas, artifacts, and dioramas. See p. 174.
- **Hakone Open-Air Museum** (Chokoku-no-Mori, Hakone): Beautifully landscaped grounds and spectacular scenery showcase approximately 700 20th-century sculptures, from Giacomo and Rodin to Henry Moore. Here, too, is the Picasso Pavilion, housing 200 of the artist's works. See p. 249.
- **Japan Ukiyo-e Museum** (Matsumoto): One of the best woodblock-print museums in Japan, this museum displays the largest collection of prints in the world on a rotating basis. A must-see in Matsumoto. See p. 263.
- **Hida Minzoku Mura Folk Village** (Takayama): Picturesquely situated around a pond with flowers, more than 30 shingled and thatched farmhouses—many transported from the surrounding Japan Alps—are filled with farm implements and objects of daily life, providing fascinating insight into the life and times of the extended families that once inhabited them. See p. 272.
- **Inro Museum** (Takayama): Of Takayama's many specialty museums, this one is my favorite: It houses Japan's largest collection of *inro* (small containers) with *netsuke* (toggles) that were once standard accessories of the kimono. You could spend hours looking at these miniature works of art. See p. 274.
- **Museum Meiji Mura** (Nagoya): This open-air architectural museum is an absolute treasure

with more than 60 original buildings and structures dating from the Meiji Period situated on 100 beautifully landscaped hectares (250 acres) on the shore of a lake. Western-style homes, churches, a Kabuki theater, a bathhouse, a prison, a brewery, and much more are open for viewing and filled with furniture and household items. Mail a postcard from an authentic post office, buy candy from an old candy store, and drink tea in the lobby of the original Imperial Hotel, which was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. See p. 358.

- **Ishikawa Prefectural Museum for Traditional Products and Crafts** (Kanazawa): Kanazawa is famous for its handcrafted items, including gold leaf, umbrellas, stringed instruments, Buddhist altars, pottery, and more. English explanations, a detailed pamphlet, and an audio guide explain how they're made. See p. 377.
- **Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution** (Kobe): You can't tell by its name, but this excellent museum is devoted to Kobe's 1995 earthquake, with films, dioramas, and exhibits detailing the city's destruction and rebirth. See p. 414.
- **Ohara Museum of Art** (Kurashiki): Founded in 1930, this museum just keeps getting better, with works by both Western and Japanese greats spread throughout

several buildings. Its location in the picturesque Kurashiki historic district is a bonus. See p. 440.

- **Adachi Museum** (Matsue): This museum near Matsue combines two of my passions—art and gardens—making it a winner. Japanese modern art is the focus indoors, while the perfectly landscaped garden comes into view through framed windows, making it part of the art in a very surreal way. See p. 450.
- **Louis C. Tiffany Garden Museum** (Matsue): This, one of the world's best collections of Tiffany paintings, furniture, ceramics, stained-glass windows, and jewelry, will take your breath away—and make you wonder how much insurance the museum pays in this earthquake-prone land. See p. 448.
- **Peace Memorial Museum** (Hiroshima): Japan's most thought-provoking museum contains exhibits examining Hiroshima's militaristic past, the events leading up to the explosion of the world's first atomic bomb, the city's terrible destruction, and its active anti-nuclear movement. See p. 458.
- **Fukuoka Asian Art Museum** (Fukuoka): This fascinating museum is devoted to contemporary and modern art from around Asia, including the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, China, Korea, and India. See p. 495.

6 The Best Small Towns & Villages

- **Takayama:** Located in the Japan Alps and surrounded by mountain peaks, this former castle town has a delightful historic quarter with 18th-century merchant homes, sake breweries, special-interest museums, craft shops, restaurants, and Japanese inns, all easy to explore on foot. Another highlight

is the **Hida Minzoku Mura Folk Village**, an open-air museum illustrating how local farmers once lived (see "The Best Museums," above). See "Takayama, Little Kyoto of the Mountains," in chapter 6.

- **Ogimachi** (Shirakawago): With its thatch-roofed farmhouses,

paddies trimmed with flower beds, roaring river, and pine-covered mountains rising on all sides, Ogimachi is one of the most picturesque rural villages in Japan. Many of the large, thatched farmhouses are now inexpensive *minshuku* (family-run inns), where you can stay and sample the local mountain cuisine. See “Rural Shirakawa & Ogimachi,” in chapter 6.

- **Tsumago:** Nestled in the Japan Alps, Tsumago served as an old post town for *daimyo* (feudal lords) and their samurai traveling between Kyoto and Edo (now Tokyo). Virtually untouched by the 20th century, it has many authentic feudal-age wooden buildings, some of which are open to the public. See “Along the Nakasendo Highway: Tsumago & Magome,” in chapter 6.
- **Nara:** This ancient capital boasts a large park with temples, shrines, museums, and the country’s

largest bronze Buddha, plus friendly free-ranging deer. See “A Side Trip to Nara,” in chapter 7.

- **Mount Koya:** This mountaintop enclave of 120 Shingon Buddhist temples is one of Japan’s most sacred places. It contains the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi, one of the most revered figures in Japanese Buddhist history, as well as an extensive burial ground of daimyo, samurai, and others who wished to be close to their leader for eternity. Following in the footsteps of emperors, nobles, and commoners who’ve made pilgrimages here over the last thousand years, you can even spend the night in one of the temples. See “The Temples of Mount Koya,” in chapter 8.
- **Uchiko** (Shikoku): This well-preserved village boasts a number of buildings dating from the Edo Period and the turn of the 20th century, including several homes now open to the public and a 1916 Kabuki theater. See p. 484.

7 The Best National Parks

- **Nikko National Park:** This 80,000-hectare (200,000-acre) national park centers on the sumptuous Toshogu Shrine with its mausoleum for Tokugawa Ieyasu, majestic cedars, and lake-side resorts. See p. 231.
- **Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park:** Boasting magnificent Mount Fuji at its core, this popular weekend getaway beckons vacationing Tokyoites with its many hot-spring spas, stunning close-up views of Mount Fuji, sparkling lakes, historic attractions relating to the famous Feudal-Era Tokaido Highway, and coastal areas of Izu Peninsula. One of the best ways to see Hakone is via a circular route that involves travel on a two-car mountain tram, a cable car, a ropeway, and a boat; the delightful

journey offers wonderful scenery and interesting sights along the way. See p. 245.

- **Japan Alps National Park:** Encompassing Honshu’s most impressive mountain ranges and the site of the 1998 Winter Olympics, this national park offers skiing as well as unique villages worth a visit in their own right. See p. 260.
- **Ise-Shima National Park:** Boasting a rugged seascape of capes, inlets, and islets, this park is the birthplace of cultivated pearls. It’s famous for its bays dotted with pearl-cultivating oyster rafts, its female divers, a pearl museum, plus a top-notch aquarium and the Ise Grand Shrines, Japan’s most venerable shrines. Two theme parks are also located here. See p. 365.

- **Seto-Naikai (Inland Sea) National Park:** Covering 650 sq. km (251 sq. miles) of water, islands, islets, and coastline, this sea park stretches from Kobe in the east to Beppu in the west. It's studded with numerous islands of all sizes, the most famous of which is Miyajima, home of the Itsukushima Shrine. Cruises ply the waters of the Seto Inland Sea, as do regular ferries sailing between Honshu, Shikoku, and Kyushu. The adventuresome can even cycle across the Seto Inland Sea via the Shimanami Kaido route linking Honshu with Shikoku (see "The Best Outdoor Adventures," below). See p. 467.
- **Unzen-Amakusa National Park:** At western Kyushu's high-altitude national park, you can climb Mount Fugen (1,229m/4,029 ft. above sea level), relax in a hot-spring bath, golf at one of Japan's oldest public courses, and take a walk through the Hells, the park's extra-steamy sulfur springs. See p. 553.
- **Towada-Hachimantai National Park:** Tohoku's most popular park

beckons with scenic lakes, rustic hot-spring spas, hiking, and skiing. See p. 569.

- **Shikotsu-Toya National Park:** This 987-sq.-km (381-sq.-mile) park in eastern Hokkaido encompasses lakes, volcanoes, and famous hot-spring resorts like Noboribetsu. See p. 594.
- **Daisetsuzan National Park:** The largest of Japan's 28 national parks—and some say Hokkaido's most beautiful—Daisetsuzan boasts three volcanic chains, fir- and birch-covered hillsides, the impressive Soukyo Gorge, and plenty of skiing and hiking opportunities. See p. 601.
- **Akan National Park:** Popular for hiking, skiing, canoeing, and fishing, Akan National Park in Hokkaido is characterized by dense forests of subarctic primeval trees and caldera lakes, the most famous of which are Kussharo, one of Japan's largest mountain lakes, and Mashu, considered one of Japan's least-spoiled lakes and one of the world's clearest. See p. 605.

8 The Best of Old Japan

- **Splurging on a Night in a Ryokan:** If you can afford to, splurge on at least 1 night in one of the country's best ryokan, where the service is impeccable, the kaiseki meals are out of this world, and glorious views outside your tatami room are of miniature landscaped gardens. You'll be pampered in a manner befitting an emperor—many of the nation's oldest ryokan were indeed born to serve members of the imperial court and feudal lords as they traveled Japan's highways. See "Tips on Accommodations," in chapter 2; the "Where to Stay" sections in the regional chapters; and "The

Best Traditional Ryokan," later in this chapter.

- **Attending a Sumo Match:** There's nothing quite like watching two monstrous sumo wrestlers square off, bluff, and grapple as they attempt to throw each other on the ground or out of the ring. Matches are great cultural events, but even if you can't attend a match, you can watch one on TV during one of the six annual 15-day tournaments. For more information, see "Spectator Sports," in chapter 4, and "Sumo," in appendix A.
- **Strolling through a Japanese Garden:** Most of Japan's famous

gardens are relics of the Edo Period, when the shogun, daimyo feudal lords, imperial family, and even samurai and Buddhist priests developed private gardens for their own viewing pleasure. Each step in a strolling garden brings a new view to die for. Refer to “The Best Gardens,” earlier in this chapter, and the “Attractions” sections in the regional chapters, to see which are heaven on earth.

- **Participating in Zazen Meditation in a Buddhist Temple:**

Zazen, or sitting meditation, is practiced by Zen Buddhists as a form of spiritual training and by laypeople as a way to relieve stress and clear the mind. Several temples in Japan are willing to take in foreigners for Zazen sessions. See the “Five Unforgettable Ways to Immerse Yourself in Japanese Culture” section in chapter 4, and the “Here and Zazen: Buddhism in Japan” box on p. 614.

- **Attending a Traditional Tea Ceremony:** Developed in the 16th century as a means to achieve inner harmony with nature, the highly ritualized ceremony is carried out in teahouses throughout the country, including those set in Japan’s many parks and gardens. Several Tokyo hotels offer instruction in the tea ceremony in English. See p. 181.

- **Getting a Shiatsu Massage:** Shiatsu, or pressure-point massage, is available in virtually all first-class accommodations in Japan and at most moderately priced ones as well. After a hard day of work or sightseeing, nothing beats a relaxing massage and a hot bath.

- **Relaxing at a Hot-Spring Resort:** No country in the world boasts more natural hot springs than Japan, which has 19,500 different springs. Hot-spring spas are found in virtually all regions of

the country and feature everything from hot-sand baths to open-air baths. See “The Best Spas & Public Baths,” below, as well as the regional chapters.

- **Spending a Day in Asakusa**

(Tokyo): Asakusa is the best place to experience Tokyo’s old downtown, with its popular Sensoji Temple, Nakamise shopping lane with crafts and kitsch, and casual traditional restaurants. As in days of yore, arrive by boat on the Sumida River. See chapter 4.

- **Exploring Kyoto’s Higashiyama-ku District:**

Kyoto’s eastern sector is a lovely combination of wooded hills, temples, shrines, museums, shops, and traditional restaurants, making it one of the best neighborhoods in Japan for a stroll. See “A Stroll Through Higashiyama-ku,” in chapter 7.

- **Visiting Kyoto’s Gion District:**

Japan’s most famous geisha houses may be off-limits to anyone without a proper introduction, but an early-evening stroll through this enclave of wooden homes and plain facades is like a journey back in time. You might even catch a glimpse of an elaborately made-up *maiko* (apprentice) on her way to an appointment or hear strains of a *shamisen* (a traditional three-stringed Japanese instrument) played behind closed doors. See chapter 7.

- **Watching Cormorant Fishing:**

Every night in summer, wooden boats gaily decorated with paper lanterns will take you out on rivers outside Kyoto and Nagoya for an up-close look at cormorant fishing. The birds, maneuvered by fishermen in traditional garb, have tight collars around their necks to prevent them from swallowing their catch. Drinking and dining on board contribute to the festive air. See p. 337 and 360.

- **Walking to Kobo Daishi's Mausoleum on Mount Koya:** Ever since the 9th century, when Buddhist leader Kobo Daishi was laid to rest at Okunion on Mount Koya, his faithful followers have followed him to their graves—and now tomb after tomb line a 1.6km

(1-mile) pathway to Daishi's mausoleum. Cypress trees, moss-covered stone lanterns, and thousands upon thousands of tombs make this the most impressive graveyard stroll in Japan, especially at night. See "Exploring Mount Koya," in chapter 8.

9 The Best of Modern Japan

- **Attending a Baseball Game** (Tokyo): After sumo, baseball is Japan's most popular spectator sport. Watching a game with a stadium full of avid fans can be quite fun and can shed new light on America's favorite pastime. See the "For It's Ichi, Ni, San Strikes You're Out . . ." box on p. 200 and the "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" box on p. 496.
- **Visiting Tsukiji Fish Market** (Tokyo): One of the largest wholesale fish markets in the world, this indoor market bustles with activity from about 3am on as frozen tuna is unloaded from boats, auctions are held, and vendors sell octopus, fish, squid, and everything else from the sea that's edible to the city's restaurants. Be sure to bring your camera. See p. 180.
- **Seeing Tokyo from the TMG:** On the 45th floor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office (TMG), designed by well-known architect Kenzo Tange, an observatory offers a bird's-eye view of Shinjuku's cluster of skyscrapers, the never-ending metropolis and, on fine winter days, Mount Fuji. Best of all, it's free. See p. 188.
- **Hanging Out in Harajuku** (Tokyo): Nothing beats Sunday in Harajuku, where you can begin the day leisurely with brunch and then stroll the promenade of Omote Sando Dori, shop the area's many boutiques, take in a museum or two and perhaps a flea

market, and then relax over drinks at a sidewalk cafe and watch the never-ending parade of humanity. See "A Stroll through Harajuku & Aoyama," in chapter 4.

- **Shopping for Japanese Designer Clothes** (Tokyo): Japanese designer clothing is often outrageous, occasionally practical, but mostly just fun. Department stores and designer boutiques in Aoyama are the places to try on the styles if you have both the money and the figure for them. See "Shopping," in chapter 4.
- **Spending an Evening in an Entertainment District:** A spin through one of Japan's famous nightlife districts, such as **Shinjuku** or **Roppongi** in Tokyo or **Dotombori** in Osaka, is a colorful way to rub elbows with the natives as you explore narrow streets with their whirls of neon, tiny hole-in-the-wall bars and restaurants, and all-night amusement spots. See "Tokyo After Dark," in chapter 4 and "Osaka After Dark," in chapter 8.
- **Seeing Fish Eye-to-Eye in an Aquarium** (Nagoya, Toba, Osaka, Kagoshima): Because Japan is surrounded by sea, it's no surprise that it has more than its fair share of aquariums. Several have made splashy debuts in the past decade with innovative displays that put you eye-to-eye with the creatures of the deep. My favorite is the one in Osaka. See p. 357, 370, 395, and 519.

- **Visiting Holland, Spain, Outer Space, or the Edo Period Without Leaving Japan:** Theme parks are big business in Japan, many of them quite sophisticated and realistic down to the tiniest detail. **Huis Ten Bosch** (Nagasaki) is a reproduction of a Dutch village with shops, restaurants, museums, and much more; **Parque España** (Ise-Shima) takes a similar approach but with a Spanish theme. **Edo Wonderland Ise** (Ise-Shima) evokes the Warring States

Period of Japanese history, while the **Edo Wonderland Noboribetsu** (Noboribetsu) is an Edo-Era park; both have staff dressed in period costumes, theatrical events, and museums. **Space World** (Kita-Kyushu) is an amusement park based on space travel, while **Ocean Dome** (Miyazaki) is the world's largest indoor water park. All of these are great fun and a must if you're traveling with children. See p. 546, 371, 369, 597, 497, and 511 respectively.

10 The Best Spas & Public Baths

- **Oedo-Onsen Monogatari** (Tokyo): Hot water pumped from the deep supplies this unique hot-spring bath, modeled after bath-houses of the Edo Period. A visit here is both relaxing and a cultural experience. See p. 182.
- **Hakone:** Hakone abounds in hot-spring spas and ryokan along the old Tokaido Highway, which originated to serve the needs of feudal lords traveling to Edo (now Tokyo). Its proximity to Tokyo makes it my number one choice for a weekend hot-spring getaway. The most famous public bathhouse in Hakone is the state-of-the-art **Yunessun**, with its wide variety of indoor and outdoor baths. The timid should take heart—you wear a bathing suit to most of them. See “Hakone: By Mountain Tram, Cable Car, Ropeway & Boat,” in chapter 5.
- **Spa World** (Osaka): You could easily spend a whole day at this lavishly decorated, international-themed, hot-spring bathing facility: Travel the world with a bath in the German sector, a sauna in the Finnish room, and an outdoor soak in the Japanese area. Swim in the rooftop pool, relax on the sun terrace, and have a massage. See p. 395.
- **Thalassa Shima:** Set on the dramatic coastline of Ise Shima Bay, this modern resort combines the Japanese love for taking the waters with French thalasso therapy (sea-water, sea mud, and seaweed treatments). A pool overlooking the bay, rooms with seaside views, and French and Japanese restaurants make this a great sophisticated getaway. See p. 372.
- **Dogo Onsen Honkan** (Matsuyama): Located in Japan's oldest hot-spring spa, this century-old bathhouse gets my vote for the country's most delightful. It's a wonderful traditional wooden structure with baths and a communal tatami area where you can relax afterwards in a *yukata* (cotton robe) and drink tea. It's all very civilized. See p. 483.
- **Beppu:** This king of hot-spring spas offers 168 public bathhouses and baths in water, mud, and sand. **Suginoi Palace** is Beppu's most elaborate—huge pools of various sizes and temperatures. **Takegawara Bathhouse**, built in 1879, is the place to go for hot black sand—you'll be buried up to your neck. See p. 502 and 503.
- **Nyuto Onsen:** This valley in Tohoku's Towada-Hachimantai National Park is about as remote as

you can get, with a string of rustic Japanese inns and outdoor baths nestled in the wooded hills. Difficult to get to, but an experience you won't easily forget. See p. 570.

- **Noboribetsu Onsen:** Hokkaido's most popular resort and one of

Japan's best-known spas, Noboribetsu offers 11 different kinds of hot water. Foremost among the many public bathing facilities is **Daiichi Takimotokan**, with some 20 pools. See p. 595.

11 The Best Outdoor Adventures

- **Climbing Mount Fuji:** Okay, so climbing Japan's tallest—3,716m (12,388 ft.) high—and most famous mountain is not the solitary, athletic pursuit you may have envisioned—but with 600,000 people climbing it annually, it's a great, culturally enriching group activity. The most recent trend is to climb through the night with a flashlight and then cheer the sunrise from the top of the mountain. See "Climbing Japan's Most Famous Mountain: Mount Fuji," in chapter 5.
- **Hiking the Old Nakasendo Highway** (Japan Alps): Back in the days of the shogun, feudal lords were required to return to Edo (now Tokyo) every other year, traveling designated highways. Nakasendo was one of these highways, and an 8km (5-mile) stretch through a valley still exists between the old post towns of **Magome** and **Tsumago**. It's a beautiful walk, and the towns are historic relics. See p. 268.
- **Skiing in Honshu & Hokkaido:** Host of two winter Olympics (in Sapporo in 1972 and Nagano in 1998) and riddled with mountain chains, Japan is a great destination for skiing, the most popular winter sport in the country. The Japan

Alps in Central Honshu and the mountains of Tohoku and Hokkaido are popular destinations. See chapters 6, 11, and 12.

If you'd rather leave the planning to someone else, join a trip sponsored by the **Shinyi Ski Club**; contact Julia Nolet (☎ 03/3423-8858) from 10am to 10pm Tokyo time; fax 03/3423-8859; jnworwor@gol.com.

- **Cycling** (Matsuyama and Hiroshima): Hard to believe, but you can bike between Shikoku and Hiroshima Prefecture via the 69km (43-mile) Shimanami Kaido route, which actually comprises 10 bridges and six islands in the Seto Inland Sea. A well-maintained, dedicated biking path makes cycling one of Japan's best outdoor activities. See "Cycling the Shimanami Kaido," in chapter 9 and "Seeing the Seto Inland Sea," in chapter 8.
- **Shooting the Kumagawa Rapids** (Kumamoto): You can glide down one of Japan's most rapid rivers in a long, traditional wooden boat or opt for a more adventurous journey on a raft guided by professionals. Either way, the scenery is great. See "Shooting the Kumagawa Rapids," under "Kumamoto," in chapter 10.

Tips Active Vacations

For more information on outdoor activities in Japan, including hiking, skiing, cycling, windsurfing, rock climbing, and even hot-spring spas, see www.outdoorjapan.com and www.skijapanguide.com.

- **Fishing:** Most foreigners laugh when they see Japanese fishing spots—a stocked pool in the middle of Tokyo or a cement-banked river, lined elbow to elbow with fishermen. For more sporting

conditions, head to Lake Akan in Hokkaido's **Akan National Park**, where you can fish for rainbow trout or white spotted char. See "Akanko Spa & Akan National Park," in chapter 12.

12 The Best Traditional Ryokan

- **Hiiragiya Ryokan** (Kyoto; ☎ 075/221-1136): If ever there was an example of the quintessential ryokan, Hiiragiya is it. Located in the heart of old Kyoto, it's the ultimate in tatami luxury: a dignified enclave of polished woods and rooms with antique furnishings overlooking private gardens. Six generations of the same family have provided impeccable service and hospitality here since 1861. See p. 298.
- **Tawaraya** (Kyoto; ☎ 075/211-5566): This venerable inn has been owned and operated by the same family since it opened in the first decade of the 1700s; it's now in its 11th generation of innkeepers. Located in old Kyoto, its guest list reads like a Who's Who of visitors to Japan, including Leonard Bernstein, the king of Sweden, Alfred Hitchcock, and Saul Bellow. See p. 299.
- **Ryokan Kurashiki** (Kurashiki; ☎ 086/422-0730): Located right beside the willow-lined canal of Kurashiki's famous historic district, this ryokan occupies an old mansion and three 250-year-old antiques-filled warehouses. It's a great place to explore as you

wander the corridors and peek into nooks and crannies, admiring all the antiques. See p. 442.

- **Mitakiso** (Hiroshima; ☎ 082/237-1402): The tatami rooms of this traditional inn are spread among an exquisite landscape garden of stunted pines, ponds, Japanese maples, stone lanterns, and meandering streams. See p. 461.
- **Iwaso Ryokan** (Miyajima; ☎ 0829/44-2233): The setting here is as romantic as any you'll find in Japan. If you can afford it, stay in one of the ryokan's 80-year-old cottages, where you'll have a view of maples and a gurgling brook on one of Japan's most scenic and famous islands. If staying here doesn't make you feel like a samurai or a geisha, nothing will. See p. 469.
- **Kannawaen** (Beppu; ☎ 0977/66-2111): This century-old ryokan spreads through lush and carefully tended gardens. Its tatami rooms with shoji screens look out onto hot springs, bamboo, streams, bonsai, stone lanterns, and flowers. It's the perfect place to escape the crowds and relax in the traditional bathhouse or the open-air hot springs. See p. 505.

13 The Best Western-Style Hotels

- **Park Hyatt Tokyo** (Tokyo; ☎ 800/233-1234 in the U.S. and Canada): Occupying the 39th to 52nd floors of a skyscraper designed by Kenzo Tange, this might well be the most gorgeous and sophisticated hotel in all of

Japan, if not the world. Offering unparalleled views of the city, one of Tokyo's hottest restaurants, rooms you could live in, and legendary service, it's a must for anyone who can afford it. See p. 121.

- **Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Chinzan-so** (Tokyo; ☎ 800/332-3442): Surrounded by a lush, 7-hectare (17-acre) garden, this top-rated hotel is a wonderful respite in one of the world's most crowded cities, with its impeccable service and a terrific spa and health club free for hotel guests. See p. 123.
- **Nikko Kanaya Hotel** (Nikko; ☎ 0288/54-0001): Dating from the 19th century, this rambling, old-fashioned hotel combines the rustic charm of a European country lodge with design elements of old Japan—and it's just a 15-minute walk from Toshogu Shrine. See p. 235.
- **The Fujiya Hotel** (Hakone; ☎ 0460/2-2211): Established in 1878 and nestled on a wooded hillside, the Fujiya is one of Japan's oldest, grandest, and most majestic Western-style hotels. Resembling a Japanese ryokan from the outside, it boasts a comfortable interior of detailed woodwork, old-fashioned antiques-filled guest rooms, and a delightful 1930s dining hall. It also offers indoor/outdoor pools, extensive landscaping, and hot-spring baths. A stay here makes you feel like you've traveled not just to Hakone but to another decade. See p. 252.
- **Kawana Hotel** (Ito; ☎ 0557/45-1111): Built in 1936 to resemble an English country estate, this relaxed yet refined hotel boasts large, manicured lawns that slope to the sea, and two famous 18-hole golf courses. It's a great getaway from Tokyo. See p. 258.
- **The Westin Miyako** (Kyoto; ☎ 800/WESTIN-1 in the U.S. and Canada): First built in 1890 but completely remodeled, this smartly appointed hotel sprawls across more than 6.4 hectares (16 acres) of hilltop on the eastern edge of town near many famous temples. Good views, a satellite check-in counter at Kyoto Station, free shuttle service to the hotel, indoor/outdoor swimming pools, a children's day-care center, a tea-ceremony room, and a Japanese garden make this a winner. There's even an annex with Japanese-style rooms as well. See p. 303.
- **Nara Hotel** (Nara; ☎ 0742/26-3300): From far away, this 1909 building just a short walk from Nara Park resembles a palace. Rooms in the main building have high ceilings, antique light fixtures, and old-fashioned decor. See p. 350.
- **The Ritz-Carlton, Osaka** (Osaka; ☎ 800/241-3333 in the U.S. and Canada): This chain's first venture in Japan has the company's trademark antiques, artwork, and intimate public spaces, as well as such pluses as free access to its fitness center and large, well-appointed rooms. It's not far from Osaka Station. See p. 398.
- **Unzen Kanko Hotel** (Unzen; ☎ 0957/73-3263): This rustic mountain lodge of ivy-covered wood and stone was built in 1935 to cater to foreigners in search of Mount Unzen's cooler climate. It offers a casual and relaxed atmosphere, hot-spring baths, and comfortable, old-fashioned rooms not far from the Hells. See p. 556.

14 The Best Affordable Japanese-Style Places to Stay

- **Homeikan** (Tokyo; ☎ 03/3811-1181): Although it's a bit far from Tokyo's main attractions, this is my top pick for an affordable, authentic Japanese inn. Rooms do not have private bathrooms, but

pluses include a Japanese garden, nice public baths, and detailed tatami rooms adorned with traditional architectural features. Meals (optional) are served in your room. Another great plus: The owner speaks English. See p. 138.

- **Ryokan Fujioto** (Tsumago; ☎ 0264/57-3009): This 100-year-old inn is nestled back from the main street of Tsumago, a delightful village on the Edo-Era Nakasendo Highway. Meals feature local specialties. The owner speaks English; his daughter volunteers to guide visitors for free (you can request her services when making reservations). See p. 270.
- **Antique Inn Sumiyoshi** (Takayama; ☎ 0577/32-0228): Located in the heart of Takayama on the banks of the Miyagawa River, this 90-year-old former silkworm factory features an *irori* (open-hearth fireplace) in the high-ceilinged communal room, antiques and painted screens throughout, and simple but delightfully old-fashioned tatami rooms overlooking the river. See p. 276.
- **Minshuku in Shirakawago's Ogimachi**: Nestled in a narrow valley of the Japan Alps, Ogimachi is a small village of paddies, flowers, irrigation canals, and 200-year-old thatched farmhouses, about two dozen of which offer simple tatami accommodations and meals featuring local cuisine. This is a great, inexpensive escape. See p. 282.
- **Matsubaya Ryokan** (Kyoto; ☎ 075/351-3727): Opened in 1885 and owned and managed by friendly Mrs. Hayabashi, the fifth generation of innkeepers, this wooden ryokan has rooms with balconies facing a miniature inner courtyard, and rooms facing a tiny enclosed garden. See p. 297.
- **Temple Accommodations on Mount Koya**: If your vision of Japan includes temples, towering cypress trees, shaven-headed monks, and religious chanting at the crack of dawn, head for the religious sanctuary atop Mount Koya, where some 50 Buddhist temples offer tatami accommodations—some with garden views—and two vegetarian meals a day. See “The Temples of Mount Koya,” in chapter 8.
- **International Villas** (Okayama Prefecture): Financed and maintained by Okayama Prefecture, International Villas are six exceptional—and exceptionally inexpensive—accommodations in delightful and rural settings. One, located in a mountain village, is modeled after a traditional soy-sauce warehouse; two are in 19th century—renovated thatched farmhouses; two more are in open and airy modern buildings with views of the Seto Inland Sea; and the last is at a hot-spring spa. See the box “Countryside Delights: Okayama Prefecture's International Villas,” in chapter 8.
- **Miyajima Morinoyado** (Miyajima; ☎ 0829/44-0430): This public people's lodge on picturesque Miyajima island is modern yet traditional and would easily cost four times as much if it were privately owned. See p. 470.
- **Tsuru-no-yu Onsen** (Nyuto Onsen; ☎ 0187/46-2139): This rustic inn, with a history stretching back to the Edo Period, thatched-roof building, and outdoor hot-spring baths, is as close as you can get to time travel. To really save money, opt for the self-cooking wing and prepare your own meals. See p. 572.

15 The Best Culinary Experiences

- **Experiencing a Kaiseki Feast:** The ultimate in Japanese cuisine, *kaiseki* is a feast for the senses and the spirit. Consisting of a variety of exquisitely prepared and arranged dishes, a kaiseki meal is a multicourse event to be savored slowly. Both the ingredients and the dishes they comprise are chosen with great care to complement the season. There are hundreds of exceptional kaiseki restaurants in Japan, from old-world traditional to sleek modern; two standouts are **Takamura** in Tokyo and **Kagetsu** in Nagasaki. Traditional ryokan also serve kaiseki. See p. 163 and 550 respectively as well as “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style,” in chapter 2.
- **Spending an Evening in a Robatayaki:** Harking back to the olden days when the Japanese cooked over an open fireplace, a *robatayaki* is a convivial place for a meal and drinks. One of the most famous is **Inakaya** in Tokyo, where diners sit at a counter; on the other side are two cooks, grills, and mountains of food. You’ll love the drama of this place. See p. 163 as well as “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style,” in chapter 2.
- **Dining on Western Food in Modern Settings:** Japan has no lack of great Western food, and some of the best places to dine are its first-class hotels. The **New York Grill**, on the 52nd floor of the Park Hyatt in Tokyo, epitomizes the best of the West with its sophisticated setting, great views, great food, and great jazz. See p. 155.
- **Buying Prepared Meals at a Department Store:** The basement floors of department stores are almost always devoted to food-stuffs, including takeout foods. Shopping for your meal is a fun experience: Hawkers yell their wares, samples are set out for you to nibble, and you can choose anything from tempura and sushi to boxed meals. See chapter 4, the regional chapters, and “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style,” in chapter 2.
- **Slurping Noodles in a Noodle Shop:** You’re supposed to slurp when eating Japanese noodles, which are prepared in almost as many different ways as there are regions. Noodle shops range from stand-up counters to traditional restaurants; one of my favorites is **Raitei** in Kamakura. See p. 230 as well as “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style,” in chapter 2 and the “Where to Dine” sections in regional chapters.
- **Rubbing Elbows in a Yakitori-ya:** Yakitori-ya are the pubs of Japan—usually tiny affairs with just a counter, serving up skewered grilled chicken. They’re good places to meet the natives and are inexpensive as well. You’ll find them in every nightlife district in the country. See the regional chapters and also “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style,” in chapter 2.

16 The Best Destinations for Serious Shoppers

- **For Everything:** Japanese department stores are microcosms of practically everything Japan produces, from the food halls in the basement to the departments selling clothing, accessories, office supplies, souvenirs, pottery, household goods, and cameras, to rooftop garden centers. What’s more, service is great, and purchases are

beautifully wrapped. You'll be spoiled for life. See "Shopping," in chapter 4.

- **For Designer Fashions:** Tokyo's **Shibuya District** has the most designer boutiques in town, while **Aoyama** boasts main shops for all the big-name designers, including Issey Miyake and Comme des Garçons. Department stores also carry big-name designers; their annual summer sales are mob scenes. See "Shopping," in chapter 4.
- **For Souvenirs:** The Japanese are avid souvenir shoppers when they travel, so souvenirs are sold literally everywhere, even near shrines and temples. **Nakamise Dori**, a pedestrian lane leading to Tokyo's Sensoji Temple, is one of Japan's most colorful places to shop for paper umbrellas, toys, and other souvenirs. The two best places for one-stop memento shopping are the **Oriental Bazaar** (p. 204) in Tokyo and the **Kyoto Handicraft Center** (p. 340), both of which offer several floors of everything from fans to woodblock prints.
- **For Traditional Crafts:** Japan treasures its artisans so highly that it designates the best as National Living Treasures. The two best shops for a varied inventory of traditional crafts, from knives and baskets to lacquerware and ceramics, are the **Japan Traditional Craft Center** in Tokyo and the **Kyoto Craft Center**. Department stores also offer an excellent collection of traditional crafts. See "Shopping," in chapters 4 and 7 as well as p. 204 and 340 respectively.
- **For Antiques & Curios:** Flea markets are great for browsing; you'll see everything from used kimono to Edo-Era teapots for sale. Japan's largest and one of its oldest monthly markets is held the 21st of each month at **Toji Temple** in Kyoto. (A lesser flea market is held there the 1st Sun of each month.) **Tokyo** also has great weekend markets. See chapters 4 and 7.
- **For Electronics:** Looking for that perfect digital camera, CD player, calculator, or rice cooker? Then join everyone else in the country by going to one of the nation's two largest electronics and electrical-appliance districts. In Tokyo, it's **Akihabara**, where open-fronted shops beckon up to 50,000 week-day shoppers with whirring fans, blaring radios, and sales pitches. In Osaka, head to **Den Den Town**. Be sure to comparison-shop and bargain. See "Shopping," in chapters 4 and 8.
- **For Local Specialties:** Many prefecture capitals have a government-owned exhibition hall where local products are displayed for sale. Often called a *kanko bussankan*, the hall may have everything from locally produced pottery to folk toys and foodstuffs. Cities with kanko bussankan include **Kanazawa**, **Okayama**, **Matsuyama**, **Kumamoto**, and **Kagoshima**. See chapters 8, 9, and 10.
- **For Porcelain & Pottery:** Porcelain and pottery are produced seemingly everywhere in Japan. Some of the more famous centers include **Nagoya**, home to Noritake, Japan's largest chinaware company; **Kanazawa**, known for its Kutani pottery with its distinctive colorful glaze; **Matsuyama**, famous for its Tobe pottery (white porcelain with cobalt-blue designs); and **Kagoshima**, with its Satsuma pottery, which comes in white (used by the upper class in feudal Japan) and black (used by the common people). See chapters 8, 9, and 10.

Planning Your Trip to Japan

This book is designed to guide you through your own discoveries of Japan, however brief or extended your visit may be. From experience, I know that the two biggest concerns for visitors to Japan are the language barrier and the high cost of living. To help alleviate fears about the first, I've provided the Japanese symbols for establishments that do not have English signs so you can recognize their names (see appendix C), given brief instructions on how to reach most of the places I recommend, made suggestions for ordering in restaurants without English-language menus, and provided prices for everything from subway rides to admission to museums.

As for costs, probably everyone has heard horror stories about Japan's high prices. After the dramatic fall of the dollar against the yen in the 1980s and 1990s, Tokyo did indeed become one of the world's most expensive cities, with food and lodging costing as much as in New York or London, maybe more. But since Japan's economic bubble burst more than a decade ago, something happened that would have been unthinkable during the heady spending days of the 1980s—the Japanese became bargain-conscious. There are now inexpensive French bistros, secondhand clothing stores, 100-Yen shops, and hotels that haven't raised their rates in more than 7 years. Some hotels and restaurants—in a desperate bid to stay alive—have even lowered their prices.

Still, it's difficult not to suffer an initial shock about Japan's high prices, which will seem especially exorbitant if you insist on living and eating exactly as you do back home. The secret is to live and eat as the Japanese do. This book will help you do exactly that, with descriptions of eateries and Japanese-style inns that cater to the native population. By following this book's advice and exercising a little caution on your own, you should be able to cut down on needless expenses and learn even more about Japan in the process. While you may never find Japan cheap, you will find it richly rewarding for all the reasons you chose Japan as a destination in the first place.

Despite the difficulties inherent in visiting any foreign country, I think you'll find Japan very easy to navigate. There are many more signs in English now than there were even just a decade ago. And Japan remains one of the safest countries in the world; in general, you don't have to worry about muggers, pickpockets, or crooks. In fact, I sometimes feel downright coddled in Japan. Everything runs like clockwork: Subway trains are on time, all the public telephones work, and the service—whether in hotels, restaurants, or department stores—ranks among the best in the world. I know if I get truly lost, someone will help me and will probably even go out of his or her way to do so. The Japanese are honest and extremely helpful toward foreign visitors. Indeed, it's the people themselves who make traveling in Japan such a delight.

This chapter will help you with the what, when, where, and how of travel to Japan—from what documents you should take with you to how to get around easily and economically.

1 The Regions in Brief

Separated from mainland China and Korea by the Sea of Japan, the nation of Japan stretches in an arc about 2,898km (1,800 miles) long from northeast to southwest, yet it is only 403km (250 miles) wide at its broadest point. Japan consists primarily of four main islands—**Honshu**, **Hokkaido**, **Shikoku**, and **Kyushu**. Surrounding these large islands are more than 4,000 smaller islands and islets, most of them uninhabited; farther to the south are the **Okinawan islands**, perhaps best known for the fierce fighting that took place there during World War II and for their continued (and controversial) use as an American military base. If you were to superimpose Japan's four main islands onto a map of the United States, they would stretch all the way from Maine down to Florida, which should give you an idea of the diversity of Japan's climate, flora, and scenery—Hokkaido in the north is subarctic, while southern Kyushu is subtropical. Honshu, Japan's most populous island and home to Tokyo, Kyoto, and Osaka, is connected to the other three islands by tunnel or bridge, which means you can travel to all four islands by train.

As much as 75% of Japan consists of **mountains**. They are found on all four main islands and most are volcanic in origin. Altogether, there are some 265 **volcanoes**, more than 30 of them still considered active. Mount Fuji (on Honshu), dormant since 1707, is Japan's highest and most famous volcano, while Mount Aso (on Kyushu) boasts the largest caldera in the world. Because of its volcanic origins, earthquakes have plagued Japan throughout its history. In the 20th century, the two most destructive earthquakes were the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, which killed more than 100,000 people in the Tokyo area, and the 1995 Great Hanshin

Earthquake, which claimed more than 6,000 lives in Kobe.

Japan is divided into 47 regional divisions, or **prefectures**. Each prefecture has its own prefectural capital and is comparable to the U.S. state or the British county. Japan's total landmass is slightly smaller than California in area, yet Japan has almost half the population of the United States. And because three-fourths of Japan is mountainous and therefore uninhabitable, its people are concentrated primarily in only 10% of the country's landmass, with the rest of the area devoted to agriculture. In other words, imagine almost half the U.S. population living in California—primarily in San Diego County—and you get an idea of how crowded Japan is. For this island nation—isolated physically from the rest of the world; struck repeatedly through the centuries by earthquakes, fires, and typhoons; and possessed of only limited space for harmonious living—geography and topography have played major roles both in determining its development and in shaping its culture, customs, and arts.

HONSHU

Of the four main islands, Honshu is the largest and most populated. Because it's also the most important historically and culturally, it's where most visitors spend the bulk of their time.

KANTO DISTRICT

Located in east-central Honshu and comprising metropolitan **Tokyo** and six prefectures, this district is characterized by the Kanto Plain, the largest flatland in Japan. Although development of the district didn't begin in earnest until the establishment of the shogunate government in Edo (present-day Tokyo) in 1603, Tokyo and surrounding giants like **Yokohama**

and its port make this the most densely populated region in Japan.

KANSAI DISTRICT

Also called the Kinki District and encompassing seven prefectures, this is Japan's most historic region. **Nara** and **Kyoto**—two of Japan's ancient capitals—are here, as are two of Japan's most important port cities, **Kobe** and **Osaka**. With the opening of Kansai International Airport outside Osaka in 1994, many foreign visitors now opt to bypass Tokyo altogether in favor of Kansai's many historic spots, including **Mount Koya** with its many temples, **Himeji** with what I consider to be Japan's most beautiful castle, **Ise-Shima National Park** with Japan's most revered Shinto shrine, Nara with its Great Buddha and temples, and, of course, Kyoto, the former capital for more than 1,000 years with so many temples, imperial villas, and gardens that it ranks as Japan's foremost tourist destination.

CHUBU DISTRICT

The Chubu (Central) District lies between Tokyo and Kyoto and straddles central Honshu from the Pacific Ocean to the Japan Sea, encompassing nine prefectures. **Nagoya**, Japan's fourth-largest city, is Chubu's most important city and a gateway to its other destinations. The district is marked by great variety—mountain ranges (including the **Japan Alps**, see below), volcanoes (including **Mount Fuji**), large rivers, and coastal regions on both sides of the island. It's popular for skiing and hiking, for quaint mountain villages such as **Takayama**, and for tourist attractions that include the open-air Museum Meiji Mura (near Nagoya), the castle in **Matsumoto**, and Kenrokuen Garden in **Kanazawa**, considered one of Japan's finest.

THE JAPAN ALPS

Spreading over central Honshu in the Chubu District, the Japan Alps are

among Japan's most famous mountain ranges, especially since hosting the 1998 XVIII Winter Olympics in **Nagano**. **Chubu-Sangaku National Park** (also called the Japan Alps National Park) contains some of the nation's most beautiful mountain scenery, while destinations like **Takayama** and **Shirakawago** provide everything from quaint historic districts to thatched-roof farmhouses.

ISE-SHIMA

Shima Peninsula, in Mie Prefecture, juts into the Seto Inland Sea and is famous for **Ise-Shima National Park**, noted for its coastal scenery and Ise Jingu Shrines. **Toba**, birthplace of the cultured pearl, is popular for its Miki-moto Pearl Island and the Toba Aquarium. Shima Peninsula also boasts two theme parks, one fashioned after Japan's Warring States Era and the other an amusement park with a Spanish theme.

CHUGOKU DISTRICT

Honshu's western district has five prefectures and is divided by the Chugoku Mountain Range. Industrial giants such as **Hiroshima** and **Okayama** lead as the major cities, drawing tourists with reconstructed castles, Korakuen Garden, and the sobering Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima, dedicated to victims of the world's first atomic bomb. **Kurashiki** is a must for its photogenic, historic warehouse district, while **Miyajima**, part of the Seto-Naikai (Inland Sea) National Park, is considered one of Japan's most beautiful islands.

TOHOKU DISTRICT

Northeastern Honshu, with **Sendai** as its regional center, encompasses six prefectures. Known as the Tohoku District, it isn't nearly as developed as the central and southern districts of Honshu, due in large part to its rugged, mountainous terrain and harsh climate. **Matsushima**, about halfway up the coast between Tokyo

and the tip of Honshu, is the district's major tourist destination; with its pine-clad islets dotting the bay, it's considered one of Japan's most scenic spots. **Kakunodate**, located inland, is a former castle town offering preserved samurai houses and, during cherry-blossom season, a stunning show of pink flowers to travelers willing to take a road less traveled. **Towada-Hachimantai National Park**, which extends over three prefectures, boasts scenic lakes, rustic hot-spring spas, hiking, and skiing.

SHIKOKU

Shikoku, the smallest of the four main islands, is fairly undeveloped and off the beaten path for many foreign visitors. It's famous for its 88 Buddhist temples founded by one of Japan's most interesting historical figures, the Buddhist priest Kukai, known posthumously as Kobo Daishi. Other major attractions are Ritsurin Park in **Takamatsu**, Matsuyama Castle in **Matsuyama**, and **Dogo Spa**, one of Japan's oldest hot-spring spas. For active travelers, the **Shimanami Kaido route** offers 69km (43 scenic miles) of dedicated biking trails that connect Shikoku with Hiroshima via six islands and a series of bridges in the Seto Inland Sea.

KYUSHU

The southernmost of the four main islands, Kyushu boasts a mild subtropical climate, active volcanoes, and hot-spring spas. Because it's the closest to Korea and China, Kyushu served as a gateway to the continental mainland throughout much of Japan's history,

later becoming the springboard for both traders and Christian missionaries from the West. **Fukuoka**, Kyushu's largest city, serves as the rail gateway from Honshu, dispersing travelers to hot springs in **Beppu**, **Unzen**, and **Ibusuki** and to such major attractions as Kumamoto Castle in **Kumamoto** and Iso Garden in **Kagoshima**. **Nagasaki**, victim of the world's second atomic bomb, is one of Japan's most cosmopolitan cities and one of my favorites. In recent years, Kyushu has become a major destination for tourists from Taiwan, Korea, and Hong Kong, who flock to the region's many theme parks, including Ocean Dome in **Miyazaki** and Huis Ten Bosch outside Nagasaki.

HOKKAIDO

Japan's second-largest island, Hokkaido lies to the north of Honshu and is regarded as the country's last frontier, with its wide-open pastures, evergreen forests, mountains, gorges, crystal-clear lakes, and wildlife, much of them preserved in national parks. Originally occupied by the indigenous Ainu, it became colonized by Japanese settlers mostly after the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Today it's home to 5.6 million people, 1.8 million of whom live in **Sapporo**. With a landmass that accounts for 22% of Japan's total area, Hokkaido has the nation's lowest population density: less than 5% of the total population. That, together with the island's cold, severe winters but mild summers and its unspoiled natural beauty, make this island a nature-lover's paradise.

2 Visitor Information

The **Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO)** publishes a wealth of free, colorful brochures and maps covering Japan as a whole, Tokyo, and various regions of the country. For general information about Japan, ask

for "Your Traveling Companion," which includes "Tips for Budget Travel" and money-saving advice on traveling, lodging, and dining; and "The Tourist's Language Handbook," a phrase booklet to help foreign visitors

communicate with the Japanese. JNTO even has a free reservation service for select budget hotels and Japanese-style inns throughout Japan, several of which are reviewed in this guide; ask for the latest “Directory of Welcome Inns” pamphlet. Other useful publications available from JNTO include maps of Tokyo and Kyoto; “Hotels in Japan”; the “Japan Ryokan Guide,” which lists 600 Japanese inns; and the “Railway Timetable,” which contains timetables for Shinkansen bullet trains and major train lines throughout Japan. JNTO has offices in the following locations.

In the **United States**: One Rockefeller Plaza, Suite 1250, New York, NY 10020 (☎ **212/757-5640**; info@jntonyc.org); 515 S. Figueroa, Suite 1470, Los Angeles, CA 90071 (☎ **213/623-1952**; info@jnto-lax.org); and 1 Daniel Burnham Court, Suite 250C, San Francisco, CA 94109 (☎ **415/292-5686**; info@jntosf.org).

In **Canada**: 165 University Ave., Toronto, ON M5H 3B8, Canada (☎ **416/366-7140**; info@jntoxyz.com).

In the **United Kingdom**: Heathcoat House, 20 Savile Row, London W1X 1AE, England (☎ **020/7734-9638**; info@jnto.co.uk).

In **Australia**: Room 1813, Australia Square Tower, 264 George St., Sydney, NSW 2000, Australia (☎ **02/9251-3034**; jntosyd@tokyonet.com.au).

THE JNTO ONLINE You can also reach JNTO via the Internet at **www.jnto.go.jp** (for North American travelers also at **www.japantravelinfo.com** and for British travelers also at **www.seejapan.co.uk**), where you can read up on what’s new, view maps of more than 20 major cities, check train and flight schedules and fares around Japan, get the latest weather reports, find links to online hotel reservation companies, and browse through information ranging from reasonable accommodations and hints on budget

travel to regional events, museums, and attractions.

THE JNTO IN JAPAN In Japan, your best bet for general or specific information is at one of the JNTO’s four excellent **Tourist Information Centers (TICs)**. The TIC maintains offices in Tokyo and Kyoto as well as at Narita Airport outside Tokyo and at Kansai International Airport outside Osaka (see chapters 4, 7, 8, and 9 for locations and open hours). All distribute leaflets on destinations throughout Japan that are not available at the destinations themselves. (If you’re going to Hiroshima, for example, you can get JNTO’s “Hiroshima and Miyajima” leaflet only at one of the four TICs.) They also provide train, bus, and ferry schedules and leaflets on major attractions and sights—for example, Japanese gardens, hot springs, museums, and art galleries. Unfortunately, since these leaflets are almost never available at the destinations themselves, you should be sure to pick them up at a TIC for any destination you might be interested in before beginning your journey.

LOCAL INFORMATION You’ll also find locally run tourist offices in nearly all cities and towns throughout Japan, most of them conveniently located at or near the main train station. Look for the logo of a red question mark with the word **INFORMATION** written below. Although the staff at a particular tourist office may not speak English (many do), they can point you in the direction of your hotel, perhaps provide you with a map in English, and, in many cases, even make hotel bookings for you. Note, however, that they’re not equipped to provide you with information on other regions of Japan (for that, go to a TIC). I’ve included information on local tourist offices throughout this book (see “Visitor Information,” in the regional chapters), including how to reach them after you disembark from the train, and their open hours.

3 Entry Requirements & Customs

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Americans traveling to Japan as tourists with the intention of staying 90 days or less need only a valid passport to enter the country; visa requirements have been waived by a reciprocal visa-exemption agreement.

Note: Only American *tourists* don't need a visa—that is, those in the country for sightseeing, sports activities, family visits, inspection tours, business meetings, or short study courses. Tourists cannot work in Japan or engage in any remunerative activity including the teaching of English (though many young people ignore the law). No extensions of stay are granted, which means American tourists must absolutely leave the country after 90 days. If you're going to Japan to work or to study for longer than 90 days, you'll need a visa; contact the Japanese embassy or consulate nearest you.

Australians and **New Zealanders** do not need a visa for stays of up to 90 days. **Canadians** can stay up to 3 months without a visa, while citizens of the **United Kingdom** and **Ireland** can stay for up to 6 months without a visa.

CUSTOMS

WHAT YOU CAN BRING INTO JAPAN If you're 20 or older, you can bring duty-free into Japan up to 400 non-Japanese cigarettes, 500 grams of

tobacco, or 100 cigars; three bottles (760cc each) of alcohol; and 2 ounces of perfume. You can also bring in gifts and souvenirs whose total market value is less than ¥200,000 (\$1,667).

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME

For specifics on what **U.S. citizens** can bring back, download the invaluable free pamphlet *Know Before You Go* online at **www.customs.gov**. (Click on "Travel," and then click on "Know Before You Go Online Brochure.") Or contact the **U.S. Customs Service**, 1300 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20229 (☎ 877/287-8867) and request the pamphlet. For a clear summary of **Canadian** rules, write for the booklet *I Declare*, issued by the **Canada Customs and Revenue Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada, or 204/983-3500; www.ccrca-adrc.gc.ca). Citizens of the **U.K.** should contact HM Customs & Excise at ☎ 0845/010-9000 (from outside the U.K., 020/8929-0152), or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk for more information. **Australians** should call the **Australian Customs Service** at ☎ 1300/363-263, or log on to www.customs.gov.au. Citizens of **New Zealand** can contact **New Zealand Customs**, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (☎ 04/473-6099 or 0800/428-786; www.customs.govt.nz).

Tips An Important Note

At all times, foreigners are required to carry either their passports or, for those who have been granted longer stays, their alien registration cards. The police generally do not stop foreigners, but if you're caught without the proper identification, you'll be taken to the local police headquarters. Safeguard your passport in an inconspicuous, inaccessible place like a money belt. If you lose it, visit the nearest consulate of your native country as soon as possible for a replacement. Keeping a photocopy of your passport information page will facilitate its replacement.

4 Money

CURRENCY The currency in Japan is called the *yen*, symbolized by ¥. Coins come in denominations of ¥1, ¥5, ¥10, ¥50, ¥100, and ¥500. Bills come in denominations of ¥1,000, ¥2,000, ¥5,000, and ¥10,000. You'll find that all coins get used, and you'll want to keep plenty of change handy for riding local transportation such as buses or streetcars. Although change machines are virtually everywhere, even on buses where you can change larger coins and ¥1,000 bills, you'll find it faster to have the exact amount on hand.

Although the **conversion rate** varies daily and can fluctuate dramatically, the prices in this book are based on the rate of US\$1 to ¥120, or ¥100 to US\$83¢.

Personal checks are not used in Japan. Most Japanese pay with either credit cards or cash—and because the country overall has such a low crime rate, you can feel safe walking around with money (though of course you should always exercise caution). The only time you really need to be alert to possible pickpockets in Japan is when you're riding a crowded subway during rush hour or walking in heavily visited areas of Tokyo.

In any case, although the bulk of your expenses—hotels, train tickets, major purchases, meals in tourist-oriented restaurants—can be paid for with credit cards, you'll want to bring traveler's checks for those times when you might not have access to an ATM for cash withdrawals, especially in rural areas.

CURRENCY EXCHANGE You can exchange money at both **Narita** and **Kansai international airports**. In addition, all **banks** displaying an AUTHORIZED FOREIGN EXCHANGE sign can exchange currency, and exchange rates usually are displayed at the

appropriate foreign-exchange counter. Banks are generally open Monday through Friday from 9am to 3pm, though business hours for exchanging foreign currency usually don't begin until 10:30 or 11am. (Be prepared for a long wait; you'll be asked to sit down as your order is sent from department to department for processing.) If you need to exchange money outside of banking hours, inquire at your **hotel**. Likewise, large **department stores** in major cities also offer exchange services and are often open until 7:30 or 8pm. Note, however, that hotels and department stores may charge a handling fee, offer a slightly less favorable exchange rate than banks, and require a passport for all transactions.

It's a good idea to exchange at least some money—just enough to cover airport incidentals and transportation to your hotel—before you leave home, so you can avoid lines at airport ATMs (automated teller machines). If you're far away from an American Express or Thomas Cook office or a bank with currency-exchange services, American Express offers traveler's checks and foreign currency, though with a \$15 order fee and additional shipping costs, at www.americanexpress.com or ☎ **800/807-6233**.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS Traveler's checks in U.S. dollars and other denominations can be exchanged for yen at most banks with exchange services and at major hotels and department stores throughout Japan, but note that you'll need your passport every time you cash a check. Traveler's checks have a slight advantage in that they generally fetch a better exchange rate than cash; they also offer protection in case of theft and are useful for obtaining cash if ATMs are not easily accessible (a notable problem in Japan). **Note:** In some very remote

The Japanese Yen

For American Readers At press time, \$1 = approximately ¥120, or ¥100 = 83¢. This was the rate of exchange used to calculate the dollar values given in this guide (rounded off to the nearest nickel for prices less than \$10 and to the nearest dollar for prices more than \$10).

For British Readers At press time, £1 = approximately ¥180, or ¥100 = 55p; this was the rate of exchange used to calculate the pound values in the table below. The euro is approximately worth ¥126.

¥	U.S.\$	U.K.£	¥	U.S.\$	U.K.£
10	.08	.06	1,500	12.50	8.35
25	.21	.14	2,000	16.65	11.10
50	.42	.28	2,500	20.85	13.90
75	.62	.42	3,000	25.00	16.65
100	.83	.56	4,000	33.35	22.20
200	1.65	1.10	5,000	41.65	27.80
300	2.50	1.65	6,000	50.00	33.35
400	3.35	2.20	7,000	58.35	38.90
500	4.15	2.80	8,000	66.65	44.45
600	5.00	3.35	9,000	75.00	50.00
700	5.85	3.90	10,000	83.35	55.55
800	6.65	4.45	15,000	125.00	83.35
900	7.50	5.00	20,000	166.65	111.10
1,000	8.35	5.55	25,000	208.35	138.90

A note on exchange rates: Since these rates will fluctuate, check the rate before you travel to Japan and use this table only as an approximate guide.

areas, even banks won't cash them. Before taking off for small towns, be sure you have enough yen with you.

You can get traveler's checks before leaving home at almost any bank. **American Express** offers denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and (for cardholders only) \$1,000. You'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%. You can also get American Express traveler's checks over the phone by calling ☎ **800/221-7282**; Amex gold and platinum cardholders who use this number are exempt from the 1% fee.

Visa offers traveler's checks at Citibank locations nationwide, as well as at several other banks. The service

charge ranges between 1.5% and 2%; checks come in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and \$1,000. Call ☎ **800/732-1322** for information. **AAA** members can obtain Visa checks without a fee at most AAA offices or by calling ☎ **866/339-3378**. **MasterCard** also offers traveler's checks. Call ☎ **800/223-9920** for a location near you.

If you choose to carry traveler's checks, be sure to keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

CREDIT CARDS Credit cards are convenient for obtaining cash and for

paying for accommodations, meals at expensive restaurants, train or air tickets, and major purchases. The exchange rate is better than what you can get for either cash or traveler's checks at a bank (though fees charged by your bank or credit card company may cancel any real savings; before going abroad, ask your card issuer how it calculates the exchange rate and about applicable fees). They are a safe way to carry money and provide a convenient record of all your expenses.

The most readily accepted cards are **MasterCard** (also called Eurocard), **Visa**, and the Japanese credit card **JCB** (Japan Credit Bank); many tourist-oriented facilities also accept **American Express** and **Diners Club**. Shops and restaurants accepting credit and charge cards will usually post which cards they accept at the door or near the cash register. However, some establishments may be reluctant to accept cards for small purchases and inexpensive meals; inquire beforehand. In addition, note that the vast majority of Japan's smaller and least-expensive businesses—many restaurants, noodle shops, fast-food joints, mom-and-pop establishments, and some of the cheapest accommodations—as well as Japanese-style inns that may charge upward of more than \$150 a night per person, do not accept credit cards.

GETTING CASH USING YOUR CREDIT CARD OR BANK ATM CARD You can also use bank-issued credit cards and ATM cards to get cash. Because most ATM machines in Japan accept only cards issued by Japanese banks, your best bet for obtaining cash is a **post office**. All 21,000 post offices across Japan accept foreign bankcards operating on the

Cirrus (MasterCard) or PLUS (Visa) systems. The catch is that even though the ATM may be located outside the main postal transaction area, machines are operable only during limited hours (depending on the bank, that may be until 6 or 7pm weekdays and up to 5pm on weekends). Besides post offices, other places with ATMs that might accept foreign-issued cards include **Citibank** (which usually accepts both Visa and MasterCard and sometimes American Express as well), **large department stores**, and **airports**. Ask the local tourist office for the most convenient location. **Note:** There is no public American Express office in Japan.

To obtain cash from an ATM or credit card, you must have a personal identification number (PIN). If you've forgotten your PIN number or didn't even know you had one, call the phone number on the back of your card and ask the bank to send it to you. If you already have a PIN, it's a good idea to check with your card issuer to be certain your PIN will work in Japan. Ask, too, for a list of banks that will honor your card and what your daily withdrawal limit is. Or, check your company's website (Cirrus/MasterCard ☎ **800/424-7787**, www.mastercard.com; PLUS/Visa ☎ **800/843-7587**, www.visa.com).

Also keep in mind that many banks impose a fee every time a card is used at a different bank's ATM, and that fee can be higher for international transactions (up to \$5 or more) than for domestic ones (where they're rarely more than \$1.50). On top of this, the bank from which you withdraw cash may charge its own fee. For international withdrawal fees, ask your bank.

5 When to Go

CLIMATE Most of Japan's islands lie in a temperate seasonal wind zone similar to that of the East Coast of the United States, which means there are

four distinct seasons. The Japanese are very proud of their seasons; they place much more emphasis on the seasons than people do in the West. Kimono,

dishes and bowls used for kaiseki, and even Noh plays, change with the season. Certain foods are eaten during certain times of the year, such as eel in summer and fugu (blowfish) in winter. Almost all haiku have seasonal references. The cherry blossom signals the beginning of spring, and most festivals are tied to seasonal rites. Even urban dwellers note the seasons; almost as though on cue, businessmen will change virtually overnight from their winter to summer attire.

Because Japan's four main islands stretch in an arc from northeast to southwest at about the same latitudes as Boston and Atlanta, you can travel in the country at virtually any time of year. Winters in southern Kyushu are mild, while summers in northern Hokkaido are cool. In addition, there's no rainy season in Hokkaido.

Summer, which begins in June, is heralded by the rainy season, which lasts from about mid-June to mid-July. Although it doesn't rain every day, it does rain a lot, sometimes quite heavily, and umbrellas are imperative. You'll also be more comfortable in light cottons, though you should bring a light jacket for unexpected cool evenings or air-conditioned rooms. After the rain stops, it turns very hot (in the 80s°F/high 20s°C) and uncomfortably humid throughout the country, with the exception of the northern island of Hokkaido, such mountaintop resorts as Hakone, and the Japan Alps.

The period from the end of August through September is **typhoon season**, although most storms stay out at sea and generally vent their fury on land only in thunderstorms.

Autumn, which lasts until about November, is one of the best times to travel in Japan. The days are pleasant and slightly cool, and the changing reds and scarlets of leaves contrast brilliantly with the deep blue skies. There are also many chrysanthemum shows in Japan at this time, popular maple-viewing spots, and many autumn festivals. Be sure to pack a jacket in autumn.

Winter, lasting from December to March, is marked by snow in much of Japan, especially in the mountain ranges where the skiing is superb. Many tourists also flock to hot-spring resorts during this time. The climate is generally dry, and on the Pacific coast the skies are often blue. Tokyo, where the mean winter temperature is about 40°F (4°C), doesn't get much snow, though it can be crisp, cold, and wet. Northern Japan's weather, in Tohoku and Hokkaido, can be quite severe, while southern Japan, especially Kyushu, enjoys generally mild, warm weather. Wherever you are, you'd be wise to bring warm clothing throughout the winter months.

Spring arrives with a magnificent fanfare of plum and cherry blossoms in March and April, an exquisite time when all of Japan is ablaze in whites and pinks. The **cherry-blossom season** starts in southern Kyushu toward the end of March and reaches northern Japan about mid-April. The blossoms themselves last only a few days, symbolizing to the Japanese the fragile nature of beauty and of life itself. Other flowers also bloom through May or June, including azaleas and irises. During spring, numerous festivals throughout Japan celebrate the rebirth of nature.

Tokyo's Average Daytime Temperatures & Rainfall

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Temp. (°F)	37	43	45	54	66	71	77	81	73	62	55	41
Temp. (°C)	3	6	7	13	19	22	25	27	23	17	13	5
Days of Rain	4.3	6.1	8.9	10	9.6	12.1	10	8.2	10.9	8.9	6.4	3.8

BUSY SEASONS The Japanese have a passion for travel, and they all generally travel at the same time, resulting in jam-packed trains and hotels. The worst times of year to travel in Japan are the **New Year's** period, from December 27 to January 4; **Golden Week**, from April 29 to May 5; and during the **Obon Festival**, about a week in mid-August. Avoid traveling on these dates at all costs, since all long-distance trains, domestic airlines, and most accommodations are booked solid. The weekends before and after these holidays are also likely to be crowded or booked. Exceptions are major cities like Tokyo or Osaka—since the major exodus is back to hometowns or the countryside, metropolises can be downright blissful during major holidays such as Golden Week, especially since most restaurants and museums do not close (privately owned museums are generally closed on public holidays; municipal and national museums that are normally closed on Mon will remain open if it's a public holiday, closing instead that week on Tues). **Note:** During New Year's, all museums and many restaurants in Japan are closed, often for 3 or 4 days.

Another busy time is during the **school summer vacation**, from about July 19 through August. It's best to reserve train seats and book accommodations during this time in advance. In addition, you can expect destinations to be packed during major festivals, so if one of these is high on your list, be sure to make plans well in advance.

HOLIDAYS National holidays are January 1 (New Year's Day), the second Monday in January (Coming-of-Age Day), February 11 (National Foundation Day), March 20 or 21 (Vernal Equinox Day), April 29 (Greenery Day), May 3 (Constitution Memorial Day), May 5 (Children's Day), the third Monday in July (Maritime Day),

the third Monday in September (Respect-for-the-Aged Day), September 23 or 24 (Autumn Equinox Day), the second Monday in October (Health Sports Day), November 3 (Culture Day), November 23 (Labor Thanksgiving Day), and December 23 (Emperor's Birthday).

When a national holiday falls on a Sunday, the following Monday becomes a holiday. Although government offices (including JNTO's Tourist Information Centers) and some businesses are closed on public holidays, restaurants and most stores remain open. The exception is during the New Year's celebration, January 1 through January 3, when almost all restaurants, public and private offices, and stores close; during that time, you'll have to dine in hotels.

All museums close for New Year's for 1 to 4 days, but most major museums remain open for the other holidays. If a public holiday falls on a Monday (when most museums are closed), many museums will remain open but will close instead the following day, Tuesday. Note that privately owned museums, such as art museums or special-interest museums, generally close on public holidays. To avoid disappointment, be sure to phone ahead if you plan to visit a museum on a holiday or the day following it.

FESTIVALS With Shintoism and Buddhism the major religions in Japan, it seems as though there's a festival going on somewhere in the country almost every day, especially in summer. Every major shrine and temple has at least one annual festival. Such festivals are always free, though admission may be charged for special exhibitions such as flower shows. There are also a number of national holidays observed throughout the country with events and festivals, as well as such annual seasonal events as cormorant fishing and cherry-blossom viewing.

The larger, better-known festivals are exciting to attend but do take some advance planning since hotel rooms may be booked 6 months in advance. If you haven't made prior arrangements, you may want to let the following schedule be your guide in avoiding certain cities on certain days.

If you do plan your trip around a certain festival, be sure to double-check the exact dates with the Japan National Tourist Organization since these dates can change. In Japan, stop by one of the TIC offices in Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai airports for a leaflet called "Calendar Events," which comes out monthly and describes major festivals in Tokyo and the rest of Japan. You can also try calling the local tourist office of the city hosting each festival for more information (see the regional chapters), though the staff does not always speak English.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

January

New Year's Day is the most important national holiday in Japan. Because this is a time when Japanese are together with their families and because almost all businesses, restaurants, museums, and shops close down, it's not a particularly rewarding time of the year for foreign visitors. Best bets are shrines and temples, where Japanese come in their best kimono or dress to pray for good health and happiness in the coming year. January 1.

Tamaseseri (Ball-Catching Festival), Hakozaikigu Shrine, Fukuoka. The main attraction here is a struggle between two groups of youths who try to capture a sacred wooden ball. The winning team is supposed to have good luck the whole year. January 3.

Dezomeshiki (New Year's Parade of Firemen), Odaiba, Tokyo. Agile

firemen dressed in traditional costumes prove their worth with acrobatic stunts atop tall bamboo ladders in this parade. January 6.

Usokae (Bullfinch Exchange Festival), Dazaifu Temmangu Shrine, outside Fukuoka. The object here is to get hold of the bullfinches made of gilt wood passed from person to person. Given away by priests, they're supposed to bring good luck. January 7.

Coming-of-Age Day, a national holiday. This day honors young people who have reached the age of 20, when they can vote and assume other responsibilities. On this day, they visit shrines throughout the country to pray for their future. In Tokyo, the most popular shrine for the occasion is Meiji Shrine near Harajuku Station. Second Monday in January.

Toka Ebisu Festival, Imamiya Ebisu Shrine, Osaka. Ebisu is considered the patron saint of business and good fortune, so this is the time when businesspeople pray for a successful year. The highlight of the festival is a parade of women dressed in colorful kimono and carried through the streets in palanquins (covered litters). January 9 to 11.

Ame-Ichi (Candy Fair), Matsumoto. Formerly a salt fair, this lively festival has featured traditional candy for the past century. Second weekend in January.

Grass Fire Ceremony, Nara. As evening approaches, Wakakusayama Hill is set ablaze and fireworks are displayed. The celebration marks a time more than 1,000 years ago when a dispute over the boundary of two major temples in Nara was settled peacefully. Second Sunday in January.

Toshi-ya, Kyoto. This traditional Japanese archery contest is held in the back corridor of Japan's longest

wooden structure, Sanjusangendo Hall. January 15.

February

Sounkyo Ice Festival, Sounkyo Onsen. Ice sculptures, ice slides, frozen waterfalls lit in various colors, and evening fireworks are the highlights of this small-town festival. Month of February.

Oyster Festival, Matsushima. Matsushima is famous for its oysters, and this is the time they're considered to be at their best. Oysters are given out free at booths set up at the seaside park along the bay. First Sunday in February.

Setsubun (Bean-Throwing Festival), at leading temples throughout Japan. According to the lunar calendar, this is the last day of winter; people throng to temples to participate in the traditional ceremony of throwing beans to drive away imaginary devils, yelling, "Evil go out, good luck come in." February 3 or 4.

Lantern Festival, Kasuga Shrine, Nara. A beautiful sight in which more than 3,000 stone and bronze lanterns are lit. February 3 or 4.

Snow Festival, Odori Avenue, Sapporo. This famous 7-day Sapporo festival features huge, elaborate statues and figurines carved in snow and ice. Competitors come from around the world. February 5 to 11.

Hari-kuyo, Tokyo. To show respect for the needles that have done them great service, women bring broken pins and needles to Awashimado near Sensoji Temple in Asakusa and to Shojuin Temple on this day to stick them into squares of tofu, a custom since the Edo Period. February 8.

March

Omizutori (Water-Drawing Festival), Todaiji Temple, Nara. This festival includes a solemn evening rite in which young ascetics brandish

large burning torches and draw circles of fire. The biggest ceremony takes place on the night of March 12; on the next day, the ceremony of drawing water is held to the accompaniment of ancient Japanese music. March 1 to 14.

Hinamatsuri (Doll Festival), observed throughout Japan. It's held in honor of young girls to wish them a future of happiness. In homes where there are girls, dolls dressed in ancient costumes representing the emperor, empress, and dignitaries are set up on a tier of shelves along with miniature household articles. March 3.

Kasuga Matsuri, Kasuga Shrine, Nara. This 1,100-year-old festival features traditional costumes and classical dances. March 13.

Vernal Equinox Day is a national holiday. Throughout the week, Buddhist temples hold ceremonies to pray for the souls of the departed. Varies between March 19 to 22.

Cherry-Blossom Season (Sakura Matsuri). This rite of spring begins in late March in Kyushu and Shikoku, travels up Honshu through April, and reaches Hokkaido by the beginning of May; early to mid-April is when the blossoms bloom in Tokyo and Kyoto. Late March to May.

April

Kanamara Matsuri, Kanayama Shrine, Kawasaki (just outside Tokyo). This festival extols the joys of sex and fertility (and more recently raises awareness about AIDS). It features a parade of giant phalluses, some carried by transvestites. You'll definitely get some unusual photographs here. First Sunday in April.

Buddha's Birthday (also called Hana Matsuri, or Floral Festival),

observed throughout Japan. Ceremonies are held at all Buddhist temples. April 8.

Kamakura Matsuri, Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura. This festival honors heroes from the past, including Minamoto Yoritomo, who made Kamakura his shogunate capital back in 1192. Highlights include horseback archery (truly spectacular to watch), a parade of portable shrines, and sacred dances. Second to third Sunday of April.

Takayama Spring Festival, Takayama. Supposedly dating back to the 15th century, this festival is one of Japan's grandest with a dozen huge, gorgeous floats that are wheeled through the village streets. April 14 to 15.

Gumonji-do (Firewalking Ceremonies), Miyajima. Walking on fire is meant to show devotion and is also for purification; these rites and ancient shrine dances called *bugaku* are held atop Mount Misen. Mid-April.

Yayoi Matsuri, Futarasan Shrine, Nikko. Yayoi Matsuri features a parade of decorated floats. April 16 to 17.

Golden Week is a major holiday period throughout Japan, when many Japanese offices and businesses close down and families go on vacation. It's a crowded time to travel; reservations are a must. April 29 to May 5.

May

Hakata Dontaku, Fukuoka. Citizens dressed as deities ride through the streets on horseback to the accompaniment of flutes, drums, and traditional instruments. May 3 to 4.

Children's Day is a national holiday honoring young boys. The most common sight throughout

Japan is colorful streamers of carp—which symbolize perseverance and strength, attributes desirable for boys—flying from poles. May 5.

Takigi Noh Performances, Kofukuji Temple, Nara. These Noh plays are presented outdoors after dark under the blaze of torches. May 11 to 12.

Kanda Festival, Kanda Myojin Shrine, Tokyo. This festival began during the Feudal Era as the only time townsmen could enter the shogun's castle and parade before him; today it features a parade of dozens of portable shrines carried through the district plus a tea ceremony. Held in odd-numbered years on the Saturday and Sunday before May 15.

Aoi Matsuri (Hollyhock Festival), Shimogamo and Kamigamo Shrines, Kyoto. This is one of Kyoto's biggest events, a colorful pageant commemorating the days when the imperial procession visited the city's shrines. May 15.

Kobe Matsuri, Kobe. This relatively new festival celebrates Kobe's international past with fireworks at Kobe Port, street markets, and a parade on Flower Road with participants wearing native costumes. Mid-May.

Grand Festival of Toshogu Shrine, Nikko. Commemorating the day in 1617 when Tokugawa Ieyasu's remains were brought to his mausoleum in Nikko, this festival re-creates that drama with more than 1,000 armor-clad people escorting three palanquins through the streets. May 17 and 18.

Sanja Matsuri, Asakusa Shrine, Tokyo. Tokyo's most celebrated festival features about 100 portable shrines carried through the district on the shoulders of men and

women in traditional garb. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday closest to May 18.

Mifune Matsuri, Arashiyama, on the Oi River outside Kyoto, is when the days of the Heian Period, when the imperial family used to take pleasure rides on the river, are re-enacted. Third Sunday in May.

June

Takigi Noh Performances, Kyoto. Evening performances of Noh are presented on an open-air stage at the Heian Shrine. June 1 to 2.

Hyakumangoku Matsuri (One Million Goku Festival), Kanazawa. Celebrating Kanazawa's production of one million *goku* (5.119 bushels) of rice, this extravaganza features folk songs and traditional dancing in the streets, illuminated paper lanterns floating downriver, public tea ceremonies, geisha performances, and—the highlight—a parade that winds through the city in re-enactment of Lord Maeda Toshiie's triumphant arrival in Kanazawa on June 14, 1583, with lion dances, ladder-top acrobatics by Kaga firemen, and a torch-lit outdoor Noh performance. June 8 to 14.

Sanno Festival, Hie Shrine, Tokyo. This Edo Period festival is held on even years and features the usual portable shrines, transported through the busy streets of the Akasaka District. June 10 to 16.

Rice-Planting Festival, Sumiyoshi Shrine, Osaka. In hopes of a successful harvest, young girls in traditional farmers' costumes transplant rice seedlings in the shrine's rice paddy to the sound of music and traditional songs. June 14.

Cormorant Fishing, Nagara River near Gifu, Kiso River in Inuyama (near Nagoya), and Oi River near Kyoto. Visitors board small wooden

boats after dark to watch cormorants dive into the water to catch *ayu*, a kind of trout. Generally June to September.

July

Ueki Ichi (Potted-Plant Fair), Fuji Sengen Shrine, Tokyo. Held near Asakusa, this fair displays different kinds of potted plants and bonsai (miniature, dwarfed trees) as well as a miniature Mount Fuji that symbolizes the opening of the official climbing season. July 1.

Hakata Yamagasa, Fukuoka. The main event takes place on the 15th, when a giant fleet of floats, topped with elaborate decorations that range from miniature castles to dolls, is paraded through the streets. July 1 to 15.

Tanabata (Star Festival), celebrated throughout Japan. According to myth, the two stars Vega and Altair, representing a weaver and a shepherd, are allowed to meet once a year on this day. If the skies are cloudy, however, the celestial pair cannot meet and must wait another year. Celebrations may differ from town to town, but in addition to parades and food/souvenir stalls, look for bamboo branches with colorful strips of paper bearing children's wishes. July 7.

Hozuki Ichi (Ground-Cherry Pod Fair), Tokyo. This colorful affair at Sensoji Temple in Asakusa features hundreds of stalls selling ground-cherry pods and colorful wind bells. July 9 to 10.

Yamakasa, Fukuoka. Just before the crack of dawn, seven teams dressed in loincloths and happi coats (short, colorful, kimono-like jackets) race through town, bearing 1-ton floats on their shoulders. In addition, elaborately decorated, 9m (30-ft.) tall floats designed by Hakata doll masters are on display throughout town. July 15.

Gion Matsuri, Kyoto. One of the most famous festivals in Japan, this dates back to the 9th century, when the head priest at Yasaka Shrine organized a procession to ask the gods' assistance in a plague raging in the city. Although celebrations continue throughout the month, the highlight is on the 17th, when more than 30 spectacular, wheeled floats wind their way through the city streets to the accompaniment of music and dances. Many visitors plan their trip to Japan around this event. July 16 and 17.

Maritime Day. Dedicated to those employed in the marine industry, this national holiday celebrates the importance of the sea in Japan's livelihood. Third Monday in July.

Kobe Summer Festival, Kobe. Community groups, including many national and international samba teams, parade through the streets of Sannomiya and Motomachi. This is followed by fireworks displays over Kobe Port along with many staged events throughout the city. July 20.

Obon Festival. This national festival commemorates the dead who, according to Buddhist belief, revisit the world during this period. Many Japanese return to their hometowns for the religious rites, especially if a family member has died recently. As one Japanese whose grandmother had died a few months before told me, "I have to go back to my hometown—it's my grandmother's first Obon." Mid-July or mid-August, depending on the area in Japan.

Tenjin Matsuri, Temmangu Shrine, Osaka. One of the city's biggest festivals, this dates back to the 10th century when the people of Osaka visited Temmangu Shrine to pray for protection against the diseases prevalent during the long, hot summer. They would take

pieces of paper cut in the form of human beings and, while the Shinto priest said prayers, would rub the paper over themselves in ritual cleansing. Afterward, the pieces of paper were taken by boat to the mouth of the river and disposed of. Today, events are re-enacted with a procession of more than 100 sacred boats making their way downriver, followed by a fireworks display. There's also a parade of some 3,000 people in traditional costume. July 24 and 25.

Matsuri-Miyazaki Festival, on the riverside by City Hall, Miyazaki. Miyazaki Prefecture's largest festival attracts more than 300,000 people with its performing arts and stalls selling food and local products. Late July.

Kangensai Music Festival, Itsukushima Shrine, Miyajima. There is classical court music and *Bugaku* dancing, and three barges carry portable shrines, priests, and musicians across the bay along with a flotilla of other boats. Because this festival takes place according to the lunar calendar, the actual date changes each year. Late July or early August.

Hanabi Taikai (Fireworks Display), Tokyo. This is Tokyo's largest summer celebration, and everyone sits on blankets along the banks of the Sumida River near Asakusa to see the show. It's great fun! Last Saturday of July.

August

Oshiro Matsuri, Himeji. This celebration is famous for its Noh dramas lit by bonfire and performed on a special stage on the Himeji Castle grounds, as well as a procession from the castle to the city center with participants dressed as feudal lords and ladies in traditional costume. First Friday and Saturday of August.

Peace Ceremony, Peace Memorial Park, Hiroshima. This ceremony is held annually in memory of those who died in the atomic bomb blast of August 6, 1945. In the evening, thousands of lit lanterns are set adrift on the Ota River in a plea for world peace. A similar ceremony is held on August 9 in Nagasaki. August 6.

Tanabata Festival, Sendai. Sendai holds its Star Festival 1 month later than the rest of Japan. It's the country's largest, and the whole town is decorated with colored paper streamers. August 6 to 8.

Matsuyamam Festival, Matsuyama. Jubilant festivities include dances, fireworks, a parade, and a night fair. August 11 to 13.

Takamatsu Festival, Takamatsu. About 6,000 people participate in a dance procession that threads its way along Chuo Dori Avenue; anyone can join in. There's also a fireworks display. August 12 to 14.

Toronagashi and Fireworks Display, Matsushima. A fireworks display is followed by the setting adrift on the bay of about 5,000 small boats with lanterns, which are meant to console the souls of the dead; another 3,000 lanterns are lit on islets in the bay. Evening of August 15.

Daimonji Bonfire, Mount Nyoigadake, Kyoto. A huge bonfire in the shape of the Chinese character *dai*, which means "large," is lit near the peak of the mountain; it's the highlight of the Obon Festival (see July above). Mid-August.

September

Yabusame, Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine, Kamakura. Archery performed on horseback recalls the days of the samurai. September 16.

October

Okunchi Festival, Suwa Shrine, Nagasaki. This 350-year-old festival,

one of Kyushu's best, illustrates the influence of Nagasaki's Chinese population through the centuries. Highlights include a parade of floats and dragon dances. October 7 to 9.

Marimo Matsuri, Lake Akan, Hokkaido. This festival is put on by the native Ainu population to celebrate *marimo* (a spherical weed found in Lake Akan) and includes dances. Mid-October.

Takayama Matsuri (Autumn Festival), Takayama. As in the festival held here in April, huge floats are paraded through the streets. October 9 and 10.

Nagoya Festival, Nagoya. Nagoya's biggest event commemorates three of its heroes—Tokugawa Ieyasu, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and Oda Nobunaga—in a parade that goes from City Hall to Sakae and includes nine floats with mechanical puppets, marching bands, and a traditional orchestra. Second weekend in October.

Nada Kenka Matsuri (Rough-house Festival), Matsubara Shrine, Himeji. Youths shouldering portable shrines jostle each other as they attempt to show their skill in balancing their heavy burdens. October 14 and 15.

Doburoku Matsuri Festival, Ogi-machi, Shirakawago. This village festival honors unrefined sake, said to represent the spirit of god, with a parade, an evening lion dance, and plenty of eating and drinking. October 14 to 19.

Nikko Toshogu Shrine Festival, Nikko. A parade of warriors in early-17th-century dress are accompanied by spear-carriers, gun-carriers, flag-bearers, Shinto priests, pages, court musicians, and dancers as they escort a sacred portable shrine. October 17.

Jidai Matsuri (Festival of the Ages), Heian Shrine, Kyoto. Another of Kyoto's grand festivals, this is one of the city's most interesting. Held in commemoration of the founding of the city in 794, it features a procession of more than 2,000 people dressed in ancient costumes representing different epochs of Kyoto's 1,200-year history. October 22.

November

Ohara Matsuri, Kagoshima. About 15,000 people parade through the town in cotton *yukata*, dancing to the tune of popular local folk songs. A sort of Japanese Mardi Gras, this event attracts several hundred thousand spectators each year. November 2 to 3.

Daimyo Gyoretsu, Hakone. The old Tokaido Highway that used to link Kyoto and Tokyo comes alive again with a faithful reproduction of a feudal lord's procession in the olden days. November 3.

Shichi-go-san (Children's Shrine-Visiting Day), held throughout Japan. Shichi-go-san literally means "seven-five-three" and refers to children of these ages who are dressed in their kimono best and taken to shrines by their elders to express thanks and pray for their future. In Tokyo, the most popular sites are Asakusa Shrine, Kanda Myojin, and Meiji Shrine. November 15 (or the nearest Sun).

Tori-no-Ichi (Rake Fair), Otori Shrine, Tokyo. This fair in Asakusa features stalls selling rakes lavishly decorated with paper and cloth, which are thought to bring good luck and fortune. Based on the

lunar calendar, the date changes each year. Mid-November.

December

Gishi-sai, Sengakuji Station, Tokyo. This memorial service honors 47 *ronin* (master-less samurai) who avenged their master's death by killing his rival and parading his head; for their act, all were ordered to commit suicide. Forty-seven men dressed as the ronin travel to Sengakuji Temple (the site of their and their master's burial) with the enemy's head to place on their master's grave. December 14.

On-Matsuri, Kasuga Shrine, Nara. This festival features a parade of people dressed as courtiers, retainers, and wrestlers of long ago. Mid-December.

Hagoita-Ichi (Battledore Fair), Sensoji Temple, Tokyo. Popular since Japan's feudal days, this Asakusa festival features decorated paddles of all types and sizes. Most have designs of Kabuki actors—images made by pasting together padded silk and brocade—and make great souvenirs and gifts. December 17 to 19.

New Year's Eve. At midnight, many temples ring huge bells 108 times to signal the end of the old year and the beginning of the new. Families visit temples and shrines throughout Japan to pray for the coming year. In Tokyo, Meiji Shrine is the place to be for this popular family celebration, as thousands throng to the shrine to usher in the new year at midnight; many of the area coffee shops and restaurants stay open all night, and trains operate the entire night. December 31.

6 Health & Safety

STAYING HEALTHY

It's safe to drink tap water and eat to your heart's content everywhere in

Japan (pregnant women, however, are advised to avoid eating raw fish or taking hot baths). Although Japan has

had nine cases of mad cow disease since the first confirmed case in 2001, all slaughtered cows must now be checked for the disease before the meat is authorized for consumption.

You don't need any inoculations to enter Japan. **Prescriptions** can be filled at Japanese pharmacies *only if they're issued by a Japanese doctor*. To avoid the hassle, bring more prescription medications than you think you'll need, clearly labeled in their original vials, and be sure to pack them in your carry-on luggage. But to be safe, you should also bring copies of your prescriptions with you, including generic names of medicines in case a local pharmacist is unfamiliar with the brand name. Over-the-counter items are easy to obtain, though name brands are likely to be different from those back home, some ingredients allowed elsewhere may be forbidden in Japan, and prices are likely to be higher.

If you suffer from a chronic illness, consult your doctor before your departure. For conditions like epilepsy, diabetes, or heart problems, wear a **Medic Alert Identification Tag** (☎ 800/825-3785; www.medicalert.org), which will immediately alert doctors to your condition and give them access to your records through Medic Alert's 24-hour hot line.

Contact the **International Association for Medical Assistance to**

Travelers (IAMAT; ☎ 716/754-4883 in the U.S. or, in Canada, 416/652-0137; www.iamat.org) for information regarding local English-speaking doctors. In Japan, the local consulate and sometimes even the local tourist office can provide a list of area doctors who speak English. If you do get sick, you may want to ask the concierge at your hotel—some hotels even have in-house doctors or clinics. If you can't find a doctor who can help you right away, try the emergency room at the local hospital. Many emergency rooms have walk-in-clinics for emergency cases that are not life-threatening, though there are usually set hours of operation and you'll have to pay out of pocket (and then try to get reimbursed from your insurance company later).

STAYING SAFE

One of the greatest delights of traveling in Japan is that the country is safe and the people are honest. When Janie forgot her purse in a public restroom in Osaka in 2003, someone turned it in to the police station complete with money, digital camera, and passport. That said, petty crime is on the increase and you should stay alert to pickpockets in congested areas like subways in big cities like Tokyo. Women should avoid public parks at night. Otherwise, I feel safe walking anywhere in Japan day or night.

7 Specialized Travel Resources

TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

For travelers with disabilities, traveling can be a nightmare in Japan, especially in Tokyo and other large metropolises. In Tokyo, for example, most subways are accessible only by stairs, and lots of them; and many sidewalks can be so jam-packed that getting around on crutches or in a wheelchair is

exceedingly difficult. Although Tokyo's subway trains have seating for passengers with disabilities—located in the first and last compartments of the train and indicated by a white circle with a blue seat—subways can be so crowded that there's barely room to move. In addition, the seats for travelers with disabilities are almost always occupied by commuters—so unless

you're visibly handicapped, no one is likely to offer you his or her seat. Even Japanese homes are not very accessible, since the main floor is always raised about a foot above the entrance-hall floor. Not surprisingly, people with mobility limitations are a rare sight in the larger cities.

When it comes to facilities for the blind, however, Japan has a very advanced system. Throughout subway stations and on many major sidewalks in Tokyo and other cities, raised dots and lines on the ground guide blind people at intersections and toward subway platforms. In some cities, streetlights chime a certain tune when the signal turns green east-west and another for north-south greens. Even Japanese yen notes are identifiable by a slightly raised circle—the ¥1,000 note has one circle in a corner, while the ¥10,000 note has two. And finally, many elevators have floors indicated in Braille.

In any case, a disability shouldn't stop anyone from traveling. Because Tokyo can be confusing and frustrating even for the able-bodied, travelers with disabilities may wish to journey to Japan's smaller cities and rural villages. Those using a wheelchair should travel with a compact one. There are more resources out there than ever before. Consider joining the **Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality** (☎ 212/447-7284; www.sath.org) for \$45 annually, \$30 for seniors and students, to gain access to their vast network of connections in the travel industry. They provide information sheets on travel destinations and referrals to tour operators that specialize in travel for people with disabilities.

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

While there are many gay and lesbian establishments in big cities like Tokyo, the gay community in Japan is not a vocal one, and, in any case,

information in English is hard to come by. The **International Gay & Lesbian Travel Association (IGLTA)**; ☎ 800/448-8550 or 954/776-2626; www.igltat.org) is the trade association for the gay and lesbian travel industry, and offers an online directory of gay- and lesbian-friendly travel businesses; go to their website and click on "Members."

Many agencies offer tours and travel itineraries specifically for gay and lesbian travelers. **Above and Beyond Tours** (☎ 800/397-2681; www.abovebeyondtours.com) is the exclusive gay and lesbian tour operator for United Airlines. **Now, Voyager** (☎ 800/255-6951; www.nowvoyager.com) is a well-known San Francisco-based gay-owned and operated travel service.

The following travel guides are available at most travel bookstores and gay and lesbian bookstores, or you can order them from **Giovanni's Room** bookstore, 1145 Pine St., Philadelphia, PA 19107 (☎ 215/923-2960; www.giovannisroom.com); **Out and About** (☎ 800/929-2268 or 415/644-8044; www.outandabout.com), which offers guidebooks and a newsletter 10 times a year packed with solid information on the global gay and lesbian scene; **Spartacus International Gay Guide** (Bruno Gmunder Verlag) and **Odysseus: The International Gay Travel Planner** (Odysseus Enterprises Ltd.), both good, annual English-language guidebooks focused on gay men; the **Damron** guides (Damron Company), with separate, annual books for gay men and lesbians; and **Gay Travel A to Z: The World of Gay & Lesbian Travel Options at Your Fingertips** by Marianne Ferrari (Ferrari Publications; Box 35575, Phoenix, AZ 85069), a very good gay and lesbian guidebook series.

8 The 21st-Century Traveler

PLANNING YOUR TRIP ONLINE

SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The “big three” online travel agencies, **Expedia.com**, **Travelocity.com**, and **Orbitz.com** sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try **Expedia.ca** and **Travelocity.ca**; U.K. residents can go for **Expedia.co.uk** and **Opodo.co.uk**.) Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it’s wise to shop around. Expedia and Travelocity will also send you **e-mail notification** when a cheap fare becomes available to your favorite destination. Another place to look for discounted fares is **www.cheaptickets.com**.

Also remember to check **airline websites**. Even with major airlines, you can often shave a few bucks from a fare by booking directly through the airline and avoiding a travel agency’s transaction fee. But you’ll get these discounts only by **booking online**: Most airlines now offer online-only fares that even their phone agents know nothing about. For the websites of airlines that fly to Japan, see “Getting There,” below.

SURFING FOR HOTELS

There are multitudes of websites offering accommodations at discounted rates—but they’re mostly in Japanese. Otherwise, for general surfing, try **www.asiatravel.com** and compare prices listed with those given in this guide to see whether they are truly a bargain. For a more focused search, some 300 moderate and higher-priced hotels that are members of the Japan Hotel Association are listed at **www.j-hotel.or.jp/welcome-e.html**; membership must be approved by the government according to certain criteria. A particularly good site is **www.mytrip.net/en/index.html**, Japan’s

largest online hotel reservation company for budget and moderately priced accommodations throughout the country. For business hotels, check the Japan City Hotel Association’s list in major cities throughout the country at **www.jcha.or.jp**. Budget hotels that are members of the Japan Economy Hotel Group can be perused at **www.kid97.co.jp/~jeh-group/eh-group.html**.

For Japanese-style inns, called **ryokan**, check **www.ryokan.co.jp**. Budget-priced Japanese inns, which do not offer the service or the class of high-priced inns but do offer the experience of sleeping Japanese-style, are listed at **www.jpinn.com**. Finally, the Japan National Tourist Organization offers an online booking service for more than 700 budget hotels and inns throughout Japan through its Welcome Inns Reservation Center (**www.itcj.or.jp**). See “Tips on Accommodations,” below, for more information.

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME

Cybercafes are finally catching on in Japan, though they’re still nonexistent in small towns. We’ve listed cybercafes for many destinations when we could find them (see individual chapters), but more may have opened by the time you travel. Although there’s no definitive directory for cybercafes—these are independent businesses, after all—two places to start looking are at **www.cybercaptive.com** and **www.cybercafe.com**. During your travels, ask local tourist offices for cybercafe locations.

Otherwise, **Kinko’s**, with more than 50 locations in Japan, is the largest chain offering Internet connections, though prices are high, generally ¥200 (\$1.65) or more per 10 minutes (call ☎ 0120-001-966 toll-free for the

nearest location). Hotel business centers, which charge even higher rates, should be a last option. Some hotels, however, offer interactive TVs with a keyboard and Internet access in their

guest rooms, a bargain if you're going to be glued to the computer for a day. (Prices start at about ¥1,000/\$8.35 per day.)

9 Getting There

BY PLANE

Japan has two international airports. Outside Tokyo is **Narita International Airport**, where you'll want to land if your main business is in the capital, in the surrounding region, or at points north or east such as Hokkaido. Japan's other international airport, **Kansai International Airport (KIX)**, outside Osaka, is convenient if your destination is Osaka, Kobe, Nara, Kyoto, or western or southern Japan; it is also convenient for domestic air travel within Japan, since most domestic flights out of Tokyo depart from Haneda Airport, necessitating an airport transfer if you arrive at Tokyo International Airport. Some international flights also serve Nagoya, Fukuoka, and Sapporo airports.

THE MAJOR CARRIERS

Since the flying time to Tokyo is about 12 hours from Los Angeles and 13½ hours from Chicago or New York, you'll want to consider on-board services and even mileage programs (you'll earn lots of miles on this round-trip) as well as ticket price when choosing your carrier. Airlines flying to Japan from North America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand include:

Air Canada (☎ 888/247-2262; www.aircanada.com) offers flights from Vancouver to Tokyo and Osaka daily.

Air New Zealand (☎ 0800/737-000 in New Zealand, 800/262-1234 in the U.S.; www.airnewzealand.com) flies from Auckland to Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya.

All Nippon Airways (☎ 800/235-9262; www.fly-ana.com) is Japan's

largest domestic carrier. It offers daily nonstop service from New York, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and San Francisco to Tokyo, as well as a direct flight from Honolulu to Osaka. It also flies from London and Sydney to Tokyo and Osaka. ANA has a code-share alliance with United Airlines (meaning that both airlines can sell each other's tickets; you can also earn United frequent-flier miles with ANA). Since combining international flights with domestic flights is cheaper than purchasing tickets separately, it's prudent to discuss your travel plans with an ANA or United Airlines agent if your final destination lies beyond Tokyo or Osaka. ANA passengers can also receive discounts at ANA hotels in Japan with free baggage transfers. Another great perk is that passengers flying round-trip from Canada or the United States can receive complimentary domestic-use cellphone rentals for a maximum of 2 weeks, with passengers paying only the calling charges; phones can be reserved online and picked up at Narita Airport upon arrival.

American Airlines (☎ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com) offers flights daily from Dallas and Chicago to Tokyo, and code-shares with Japan Airlines.

British Airways (☎ 0870 850 9850 in Britain; www.ba.com) flies from London to Tokyo.

Continental Airlines (☎ 800/523-3273; www.continental.com) offers daily flights from Newark and Houston to Tokyo.

Delta Airlines (☎ 800/241-4141; www.delta.com) offers daily flights from Atlanta to Tokyo.

Japan Airlines (☎ 800/525-3663; www.japanair.com), Japan's flagship carrier, offers more international flights to Japan than any other carrier and is noted for its excellent service. JAL flies to Tokyo from New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Vancouver, and to Osaka from Los Angeles. It also connects Japan with England, New Zealand, and Australia. JAL offers "Welcome to Japan" fares which allow overseas visitors to fly onward in Japan at discounts of up to 77% off normal fares to visit any of the 42 cities served (except during peak season; reservations and ticketing must be made prior to arrival in Japan).

Northwest Airlines (☎ 800/447-4747; www.nwa.com), operating across the Pacific for more than 50 years (longer than any other airline), offers more nonstop service between North America and Japan than any other American carrier, with nonstop flights to Tokyo, Osaka, and Nagoya. North American gateways to Japan are Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, Detroit, New York, Minneapolis–St. Paul, and Honolulu; Japan-bound flights also offer connecting service to 10 cities in Asia. The fact that Northwest (which shares mileage programs with KLM and Continental) flies to so many Asian destinations makes it easy to coordinate onward travel plans to, say, Hong Kong or Bangkok. Another Northwest code-share alliance with Japan Air System offers onward flights throughout Japan. The airline's stellar service has even attracted the hard-to-please Japanese, who regularly fly Northwest.

Qantas (☎ 800/227-4500; ☎ 13-13-13 in Australia; www.qantas.com) flies from Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane to Tokyo and Osaka.

United Airlines (☎ 800/538-2929; www.united.com) has daily nonstop flights from San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago, Washington,

D.C., and New York to Tokyo. It code-shares with ANA to and within Japan.

AIRFARES

Because the flight to Japan is such a long one, you may wish to splurge on upgraded service and a roomier seat. But we're talking about a serious splurge: Japan Airlines' round-trip first-class fare from New York to Tokyo averages about \$14,180, plus tax, while business class will cost about \$7,694. Even full-fare economy-class tickets run about \$5,655, but I doubt many people end up paying full fare.

Japan Airlines' lowest economy fares average \$840, but you can save even more money by buying an APEX (Advance Purchase Excursion) ticket. It's usually loaded with restrictions and is based on the seasons. There are three fare seasons: Peak season (summer) is the most expensive, basic season (winter) is the least expensive, and shoulder season is between the other two in time and in price. In all three seasons, APEX fares are a little higher on weekends. Japan Airlines' APEX fare in October 2003, requiring a 7-day advance purchase and with minimum and maximum stay restrictions, was \$660 for round-trip travel between New York and Tokyo on a weekday in shoulder season.

FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARE

Passengers sharing the same airplane cabin rarely pay the same fare. Here are some ways to keep your airfare costs down.

- Passengers who can book their ticket **long in advance** or who **fly midweek** or **at less-trafficked hours** will pay a fraction of the full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your flight plans.

- You can also save on airfares by keeping an eye out in local newspapers for **promotional specials** or **fare wars**, when airlines lower prices on their most popular routes. You rarely see fare wars during peak travel times, but if you can travel in the off-months, you may snag a bargain.
- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares (see the “Planning Your Trip Online” section above).
- **Consolidators**, also known as bucket shops, are great sources of international tickets. Start by looking in Sunday newspaper travel sections. **Beware:** Bucket shop tickets are usually nonrefundable or rigged with stiff cancellation penalties, often as high as 50% to 75% of the ticket price, and some put you on charter airlines with questionable safety records. Your best bet may be to deal with a company specializing in Japan. One that does is **Nippon Travel** (☎ 800/445-2332; www.nippontravel.com), which offers discounted tickets on ANA.
- Join **frequent-flier clubs**. Accrue enough miles, and you’ll be rewarded with free flights and elite status. It’s free, and you’ll get the best choice of seats, a faster response to phone inquiries, and prompter service if your luggage is stolen, if your flight is canceled or delayed, or if you want to change your seat. You don’t need to fly to build frequent-flier miles—**frequent-flier credit cards** can provide thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping.
- Your choice of airline and airplane will definitely affect your legroom. Find details on seat pitch (the distance between a seat and the row in front of it) and more at www.seatguru.com, which has extensive details about almost every seat on six major U.S. airlines. For international airlines, research firm Skytrax has posted a list of average seat pitches at www.airlinequality.com.
- Emergency-exit seats and bulkhead seats typically have the most legroom. Emergency-exit seats are usually held back to be assigned the day of a flight (to ensure that the seat is filled by someone able-bodied); it’s worth getting to the ticket counter early to snag one of these spots for a long flight. Keep in mind that bulkheads are where airlines often put baby bassinets, so you may be sitting next to an infant. In addition, you have to stow hand-carried items in overhead bins.
- To have two seats for yourself, try for an aisle seat in a center section toward the back of coach. If you’re traveling with a companion, book an aisle and a window seat. Middle seats are usually booked last, so chances are good you’ll end up with three seats to yourselves. And in the event that a third passenger is assigned the middle seat, he or she will probably be more than happy to trade for a window or an aisle.
- To sleep, avoid the last row of any section or a row in front of an emergency exit, as these seats are the least likely to recline. Avoid seats near highly trafficked toilet areas. You also may want to reserve a window seat so that you can rest your head and avoid being bumped from the aisle.

LONG-HAUL FLIGHTS: HOW TO STAY COMFORTABLE

Long flights can be trying, but with a little advance planning, you can make an otherwise unpleasant experience almost bearable.

Tips Coping with Jet Lag

A major consideration for visitors flying to Japan, especially on long flights from North America, is jet lag. Flying west has slightly less effect than flying east, which means the harder flight to recover from is the journey from Japan back to North America.

Here are some tips for combating jet lag:

- **Reset your watch** (and your mental clock) to your destination time as soon as you board the plane.
- **Drink lots of water** before, during, and after your flight. Avoid alcohol.
- **Exercise and sleep well** for a few days before your trip.
- If you have trouble sleeping on planes, **fly eastward on morning flights**.
- **Daylight** is the key to resetting your body clock. At the website for **Outside In** (www.bodyclock.com), you can get a customized plan of when to seek and avoid light. Upon reaching Tokyo, put in a normal day, even if you're tired (a brisk walk helps).
- If you need help getting to sleep earlier than you usually would (or staying asleep until morning), doctors recommend taking either the hormone melatonin or the sleeping pill Ambien—but not together. Take 2 to 5 milligrams of melatonin about 2 hours before your planned bedtime to help you fall asleep.

- Drink water before, during, and after your flight to combat the lack of humidity in airplane cabins—which can be drier than the

Sahara. Bring a bottle of water on board with you. Avoid alcohol, which will dehydrate you.

10 Escorted Tours & Package Tours

ESCORTED TOURS

If you're the kind of traveler who doesn't like leaving such arrangements as accommodations, transportation, and itinerary to chance, you may wish to join an escorted tour of Japan. Escorted tours are structured group tours, with a group leader. The price usually includes everything from airfare to hotels, meals, tours, admission costs, and local transportation.

Many people derive a certain ease and security from escorted trips. Escorted tours—whether by bus, motor coach, train, or boat—let travelers sit back and enjoy their trip without having to spend lots of time behind the wheel. All the little details are taken care of; you know your costs up front; and there are few surprises. Escorted tours can take you to the

maximum number of sights in the minimum amount of time with the least amount of hassle—you don't have to sweat over the plotting and planning of a vacation schedule. Escorted tours are particularly convenient for people with limited mobility.

On the downside, an escorted tour often requires a big deposit up front, and lodging and dining choices are predetermined. As part of a crowd of tourists, you'll get little opportunity for serendipitous interaction with locals. The tours can be jam-packed with activities, leaving little room for individual sightseeing, whim, or adventure—plus they also often focus only on the heavily touristed sites, so you miss out on the lesser-known gems.

Before you invest in an escorted tour, ask about the **cancellation**

policy: Is a deposit required? Can they cancel the trip if they don't get enough people? Do you get a refund if they cancel? If *you* cancel? How late can you cancel if you are unable to go? When do you pay in full? **Note:** If you choose an escorted tour, think strongly about purchasing trip-cancellation insurance, especially if the tour operator asks you to pay up front.

You'll also want to get a complete **schedule** of the trip to find out how much sightseeing is planned each day and whether enough time has been allotted for relaxing or wandering solo.

The **size** of the group is also important to know up front. Generally, the smaller the group, the more flexible the itinerary, and the less time you'll spend waiting for people to get on and off the bus. Find out the **demographics** of the group as well. What is the age range? What is the gender breakdown? Is this mostly a trip for couples or singles?

Discuss what is included in the **price**. You may have to pay for transportation to and from the airport. A box lunch may be included in an excursion, but drinks might cost extra. Tips may not be included. Find out if you will be charged if you decide to opt out of certain activities or meals. Ask about the **accommodations choices** and prices for each. Then look to see whether they're reviewed in this guide or check their rates online.

Finally, if you plan to travel alone, you'll need to know if a **single supplement** will be charged and if the company can match you up with a roommate.

Among the many companies offering escorted group tours is **General Tours** (☎ 800/221-2216; www.generaltours.com), with tours to major tourist destinations in Japan. **Elite Orient Tours** (☎ 800/668-8100; www.japanstorysan.com) offers tours to less traveled regions, including Shikoku, Kyushu, and Tohoku. **Esprit**

Travel (☎ 800/377-7481; www.esprittravel.com) specializes in small-group walking, hiking, and special-interest trips in Japan, including some that take in textile arts, Japanese gardens, and the old Tokaido Road.

PACKAGE TOURS

Package tours are not the same thing as escorted tours. They are simply a way to buy the airfare, accommodations, and other elements of your trip (such as airport transfers and day tours) at the same time and often at discounted prices—kind of like one-stop shopping. For destinations like Japan, they are a smart way to go because they save you a lot of money. That's because packages are sold in bulk to tour operators, who then resell them to the public at a cost that drastically undercuts standard rates.

Packages, however, vary widely. Some offer a better class of hotels than others, while others offer the same hotels for lower prices or a range of hotel choices at different prices. Some offer flights on scheduled airlines, while others book charters. Some may allow you to add on excursions or escorted day trips (also at lower prices than you could locate on your own) without booking an entirely escorted tour. If you spend the time to shop around, you will save in the long run.

The best place to start your search is the travel section of your local Sunday newspaper; or check the ads in the backs of national travel magazines like *Travel & Leisure*, *National Geographic Traveler*, and *Condé Nast Traveler*. One such company offering independent packages to Japan is **Isramworld** (☎ 800/223-7460; www.orientflexipax.com).

Probably the best resource is the airlines themselves, which often package their flights with accommodations. **All Nippon Airways** (☎ 800/235-9262; www.fly-ana.com), Japan's largest domestic carrier, offers discounts at ANA hotels and can save

you money on domestic flights planned in conjunction with your international flight. **Japan Airlines**, Japan's flagship carrier, operates JAL-PAK (☎ 800/221-1081; www.jalpak.com), offering airfare and hotel packages to Japan, plus optional escorted

day trips. **Northwest Airlines World Vacations** (☎ 800/800-1504; www.nwaworldvacations.com) offers flight-and-hotel packages to Tokyo and beyond that allow you to choose from a range of hotels and to tailor your trip from 3 to 20 nights.

11 Getting Around Japan

Japan has an extensive public transport system, the most convenient segment of which is the nation's excellent rail service. You can also travel by plane (good for long-distance hauls), bus (the cheapest mode of travel), ferry, and car.

BY TRAIN

The most efficient way to travel around Japan is by train. Whether you're being whisked through the countryside aboard the famous Shinkansen bullet train or are winding your way up a wooded mountainside in a two-car electric tram, trains in Japan are punctual, comfortable, dependable, safe, and clean. All trains except locals have washrooms, toilets, and drinking water. Bullet trains even have telephones and trolleys selling food and drinks. And because train stations are usually located in the heart of the city next to the city bus terminal or a subway station, arriving in a city by train is usually the most convenient method. What's more, most train stations in Japan's major cities and resort areas have tourist offices to help with hotel directions. The staff may not speak English, but the office usually has maps or brochures in English. Train stations also often have a counter

where hotel reservations can be made free of charge. Most of Japan's trains are run by the six companies that make up the **Japan Railways (JR) Group**, which operates as many as 26,000 trains daily, including more than 500 Shinkansen bullet trains.

SHINKANSEN (BULLET TRAIN)

The Shinkansen is probably Japan's best-known train. With a front car that resembles a space rocket, the Shinkansen hurtles along at a maximum speed of 300kmph (187 mph) through the countryside on its own special tracks. Among the most luxurious Shinkansen trains are the *Grand Hikari*, a double-decker train that travels between Tokyo and Kyushu, and the *Twilight Express*, a luxury hotel on wheels that runs from Osaka to Sapporo.

Four Shinkansen lines operate in Japan. The most widely used line for tourists is the **Tokaido-Sanyo Shinkansen**, which runs from Tokyo and Shinjuku stations west to such cities as Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, Kobe, Himeji, Okayama, and Hiroshima, before reaching its final destination of Hakata/Fukuoka on the island of Kyushu. Trains run so frequently—as often as every 10 or 15 minutes during

Tips Travel Tip

In the following chapters, to help you reach the hotels, restaurants, and sights recommended in this book, I've included the nearest train or subway station or bus or tram information followed in parentheses by the number of minutes it takes to walk from the station or bus stop to your destination.

peak times—that it's almost like catching the local subway. The **Tohoku Shinkansen Line** runs north from Tokyo and Ueno stations to Sendai, Morioka, Kakunodate, and Hachinohe, with branches extending to Shinjo and Akita. The **Joetsu Shinkansen** connects Tokyo and Ueno stations with Niigata on the Japan Sea coast. The newest line is the **Nagano Shinkansen**, completed in time for the 1998 Winter Olympics and connecting Tokyo and Ueno stations with Nagano in the Japan Alps.

Shinkansen running along these lines offer two kinds of service—trains that stop only at major cities (Nozomi and Hikari trains) and trains that make more stops and are therefore slightly slower (Kodoma). If your destination is a smaller city on the Shinkansen line, make sure the train you take stops there. As a plus, information on stops is broadcast in English. Telephone calls can be made to and from bullet trains, but to make a call you must have a magnetic telephone card (see “Fast Facts: Japan,” later in this chapter).

REGULAR SERVICE In addition to bullet trains, there are also two types of long-distance trains that operate on regular tracks. The **limited-express trains**, or L'EX (*Tokkyu*) branch off the Shinkansen system and are the fastest after the bullet trains, while the **express trains** (*Kyuko*) are slightly slower and make more stops. Slower still are **rapid express trains** (*Shin-Kaisoku*) and the even slower **rapid trains** (*Kaisoku*). To serve the everyday needs of Japan's commuting population, **local trains** (*Futsu*) stop at all stations and are the trains most widely used for side trips outside the major cities.

There are also some privately owned lines that operate from major cities to tourist destinations. **Kintetsu** (**Kinki Nippon Railway**) lines, for example, are useful for traveling in the

Kansai area and to the Ise Shima Peninsula, while **Odakyu** serves Hakone.

INFORMATION You can view fares and timetables for JR trains, maps of Tokyo and Shinjuku stations, and information on rail passes at **www.japanrail.com**. In Japan, stop by the **Tourist Information Centers** in Tokyo, Kyoto, or the international airports in Narita or Osaka (see “Visitor Information,” earlier in this chapter) for information on rail service throughout Japan, including the invaluable *Railway Timetable*, published annually in English and providing train schedules for the Shinkansen and major JR lines. To be on the safe side, I also stop by the train information desk as soon as I arrive at a new destination to check on train schedules onward to my next destination.

No matter which train you ride, be sure to hang onto your ticket—you'll be required to give it up at the end of your trip as you exit through the gate. And pack lightly, since porters are virtually nonexistent, overhead luggage space is small, and most rail stations have lots of stairs.

TRAIN DISTANCES/TRAVELING TIME Because Japan is an island nation, many people erroneously believe that the traveling time between destinations is of little concern. However, the country is much longer than most people imagine. Its four main islands, measured from the northeast to the southwest, cover roughly the distance from Maine to Florida. (Thank goodness for the Shinkansen bullet train!) In addition, transportation can be slow in mountainous regions, especially if you're on a local train.

The chart below measures the distances and traveling times from Tokyo to principal Japanese cities. Since Tokyo is located approximately in the middle of Japan, you'll most likely

change trains there when traveling from east to west and vice versa. Traveling times do not include the time needed for transferring and are calculated for the fastest trains available,

excluding the *Nozomi Super Express* (Shinkansen). (I have excluded the *Nozomi Super Express* because most tourists to Japan use the JR Rail Pass, which is not valid on the *Nozomi*.)

Train Travel from Tokyo to Principal Cities

City	Distance (Miles)	Travel Time
Aomori*	452	4 hr. 08 min.
Atami	66	45 min.
Beppu*	763	8 hr.
Fukuoka (Hakata Station)	730	6 hr.
Hakodate*	549	6 hr. 10 min.
Hiroshima	554	4 hr. 50 min.
Ito	75	1 hr. 45 min.
Kagoshima	927	12 hr.
Kamakura	32	53 min.
Kanazawa*	386	4 hr. 30 min.
Kobe (Shin-Kobe Station)	366	3 hr. 20 min.
Kumamoto*	804	8 hr. 07 min.
Kyoto	319	2 hr. 36 min.
Matsue*	578	5 hr. 45 min.
Matsumoto	146	2 hr. 30 min.
Matsuyama*	589	7 hr.
Miyazaki*	900	12 hr. 10 min.
Nagasaki*	826	8 hr. 15 min.
Nagoya	227	1 hr. 55 min.
Narita Airport	49	1 hr.
Nikko	93	1 hr. 59 min.
Okayama	455	3 hr. 52 min.
Osaka (Shin-Osaka Station)	343	2 hr. 54 min.
Sapporo*	746	10 hr.
Takamatsu*	500	5 hr. 10 min.
Takayama*	331	4 hr.
Toba*	303	3 hr. 40 min.
Yokohama	18	30 min.

*Destination requires a change of trains.

TRAIN FARES & RESERVATIONS

Trains are expensive in Japan; ticket prices are based on the type of train (Shinkansen bullet trains are the most expensive), the distance traveled, whether your seat is reserved, and the season, with slightly higher prices (usually a ¥200/\$1.65 surcharge) during peak season (Golden Week, July 21–Aug 31, Dec 25–Jan 10, and Mar

21–Apr 5). Children (ages 6–11) pay half fare, while up to two children 5 and younger travel for free with one adult (otherwise the 3rd will pay half fare). I've included train prices from Tokyo for many destinations covered in this book (see individual cities for more information). Unless stated otherwise, prices in this guide are for adults for *non-reserved* seats on the

Tips Train Travel Tips

Your best sources for train schedules are online at www.japanrail.com or the *Railway Timetable* available at JNTO's **Tourist Information Centers**. For routing information and questions about train times once you've begun your trip, call the Tourist Information Center at ☎ **03/3201-3331** in Tokyo or at ☎ **075/371-5649** in Kyoto. You can also call the **JR East InfoLine** in Tokyo for information in English (☎ **03/3423-0111**) daily from 10am to 6pm; no reservations are accepted by phone, but you can inquire about time schedules, fares, location of reservation offices, lost and found offices, and more.

fastest train available during regular season (excluding the *Nozomi Super Express*, which is not covered by the Japan Rail Pass). You can buy JR tickets and obtain information at any Japan Railways station for JR trains going throughout Japan, including those along the Yamanote Line, which loops around Tokyo. If you wish to purchase a ticket using a credit card, go to a Reservation Ticket Office at any major JR station.

Seat Reservations If you wish, you can purchase a reserved seat for the Shinkansen and Narita Express (which travels between Narita Airport and Tokyo Station; see chapter 3) before even arriving in Japan or during your travels at www.world.eki-net.com. You'll have to sign up for membership (free of charge) and provide a credit card (American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, and Visa accepted). After viewing timetables and fares, you select which train you'd like to take. You'll then receive a confirmation via e-mail, which you should print out and take with you to any JR Reservation Ticket Office or View Plaza (see the following paragraph) at major JR stations in Japan, and then pay for your ticket using the credit card you used to make the reservation. (If you fail to show up, your ticket will still be charged to your account.) Reservations can be made 1 month to 2 days prior to the train's departure date (and

is highly recommended for peak travel times). Holders of the Japan Rail Pass (see below) can also reserve seats through the website.

Otherwise, you can reserve seats for the Shinkansen, as well as for limited-express and express trains (but not for slower rapid or local trains), at any major Japan Railways station in Japan. Reserved seats cost slightly more than unreserved seats (¥510/\$4.25 for the Shinkansen). The larger stations have a special reservation counter called **Midori-no Madoguchi (Reservation Ticket Office)** or View Plaza (Travel Service Center), easily recognizable by their green signs with RESERVATION TICKETS written on them. They are generally open daily from 10am to 6pm. If you're at a JR station with no special reservation office, you can reserve your seats at one of the regular ticket windows. You can also purchase and reserve seats at several travel agents, including the giant **Japan Travel Bureau (JTB)**, which has offices all over Japan. It's a good idea to reserve your seats for your entire trip through Japan as soon as you know your itinerary, especially if you'll be traveling during peak times; however, you can only reserve 1 month in advance. If it's not peak season, you'll probably be okay using a more flexible approach to traveling—note that all trains also have non-reserved cars that fill up on a first-come, first-seated

basis. You can also reserve seats on the day of travel up to departure time. I hardly ever reserve a seat when it's not peak season, preferring instead the flexibility of being able to hop on the next available train. If you want to sit in the nonsmoking car of the Shinkansen bullet train, ask for the *kinensha*.

Tips for Saving Money If your ticket is for travel covering more than 100km (62 miles), you can make as many stopovers en route as you wish as long as you complete your trip within the period of the ticket's validity. Tickets up to 200km (124 miles) are valid for 2 days, with 1 day added for each additional 200km. Note, too, that stopovers are granted only if your trip does not originate or end in Tokyo, Yokohama, Osaka, Nagoya, Kyoto, Kobe, Hiroshima, Kitakyushu, Fukuoka, Sendai, or Sapporo. You can, however, purchase a ticket, say, in Takayama bound for Nagasaki (a total of about 1,860km/1,155 miles), stopping in Kyoto and Hiroshima along the way. In short, you can save money by purchasing tickets for long distances even though you plan to break up your journey.

You can also save money by purchasing a round-trip ticket for long distances. A round-trip by train on

distances exceeding 600km (373 miles) one-way costs 20% less than two one-way tickets.

There are also regional tickets good for sightseeing. The **Hakone Free Pass**, for example, offered by Odakyu railways, includes round-trip transportation from Tokyo and unlimited travel in Hakone for a specific number of days. If you don't qualify for a Japan Rail Pass (see below), the **Seishun 18 (Seishun ju-hachi kippu)** is a 5-day rail pass on all JR trains except Shinkansen which costs ¥11,500 (\$96). There's also a **Hokkaido Free Kippu** valid for 7 days of JR train and bus travel in Hokkaido costing ¥23,750 (\$198) for one person or ¥43,220 (\$360) for two persons traveling together.

JAPAN RAIL PASS The Japan Rail Pass is without a doubt the most convenient and most economical way to travel around Japan. With the rail pass, you don't have to worry about buying individual tickets, and you can reserve your seats on all JR trains for free. The rail pass entitles you to unlimited travel on all JR train lines including the Shinkansen (except the *Nozomi Super Express*), as well as on JR buses and the JR ferry to Miyajima.

There are several types of rail passes available; make your decision based on

Value Japan Rail Pass

You can save quite a bit by purchasing a rail pass, even if you only plan to travel a little. How economical is a Japan Rail Pass? For example, if you were to buy a round-trip reserved-seat ticket on the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Kyoto, it would cost you ¥26,440 (\$220), which is almost as much as a week's ordinary rail pass. If you plan to see more than just Tokyo and Kyoto, it pays to use a rail pass, *which you must buy outside Japan*.

Another advantage to a rail pass is that it offers a 10% discount or more off room rates at many JR Hotel Group hotels, including the Hotel Granvia in Kyoto, Okayama, and Hiroshima; the Crowne Plaza Metropolitan and Tokyo Station Hotel in Tokyo; and Hotel Kurashiki, Nara Hotel, JR Kyushu Hotel Fukuoka, JR Kyushu Hotel Nagasaki, and ANA Hotel Clement Takamatsu. A Japan Rail Pass booklet, which comes with your purchase of a rail pass, lists member hotels.

your length of stay in Japan and the cities you intend to visit. You might even find it best to combine several passes to cover your travels in Japan, such as a 1-week standard pass for longer journeys, say, to Kyushu, plus a regional Kansai Area Pass for visiting Kyoto and other destinations in the Kansai area. Information is available online at www.japanrailpass.net.

The Standard Pass If you wish to travel throughout Japan, your best bet is to purchase the standard Japan Rail Pass. It's available for ordinary coach class and for the first-class Green Car, and you can purchase passes good for 1, 2, or 3 weeks. Rates for the ordinary pass, as of October 2003, are ¥28,300 (\$236) for 7 days, ¥45,100 (\$375) for 14 days, and ¥57,700 (\$481) for 21 days. Rates for the Green Car are ¥37,800 (\$315) for 7 days, ¥61,200 (\$510) for 14 days, and ¥79,600 (\$633) for 21 days. Children (under 12, over 6) are charged half fare. Personally, I have never traveled first class in Japan and do not consider it necessary. However, during peak travel times (New Year's, Golden Week, and the Obon season in mid-Aug), you may find it easier to reserve a seat in the first-class Green Car, which you can get by paying a surcharge in addition to showing your ordinary pass.

Regional Passes If you plan to travel only to eastern or western Honshu, Kyushu, or Hokkaido, you'll probably find it more economical to purchase one of several regional rail passes available for ordinary coach class. If, for example, you are arriving by plane at the Kansai Airport outside Osaka and intend to remain in western Honshu, you may wish to opt for one of two different **JR-West Passes** offered. The **Kansai Area Pass**, which can be used for travel between Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, Nara, Himeji, and other destinations in the Kansai area, is available as a 1-day pass for ¥2,000 (\$17), 2-day pass for ¥4,000 (\$33),

3-day pass for ¥5,000 (\$42), or 4-day pass for ¥6,000 (\$50); children pay half fare. Travel is restricted to JR rapid and local trains (that is, Shinkansen and limited express trains are not included in the pass) and unserved seating.

The other JR-West Pass available is the **Sanyo Area Pass**, which covers a larger area, allows travel via Shinkansen (including the super-fast *Nozomi*) and JR local trains from Osaka as far as Hakata (in the city of Fukuoka on Kyushu), and includes Hiroshima, Okayama, Kurashiki, Himeji, and Kobe. It's available for 4 days for ¥20,000 (\$167) and for 8 days for ¥30,000 (\$250); children's passes are half price.

Though not as popular as western Honshu, eastern Honshu also offers its own **JR-East Pass**, which includes travel from Tokyo to parts of the Japan Alps and throughout the Tohoku District, including Sendai, Kakunodate, and Aomori via Shinkansen and local JR lines. Passes for travel in ordinary coach cars are available for 5 days for ¥20,000 (\$167), 10 days for ¥32,000 (\$267); a 4-day flexible pass (which is valid for any 4 consecutive or nonconsecutive days within a month) costs ¥20,000 (\$167). Half-fare children's passes and Green Car passes are also available.

If your travels are limited to the island of Kyushu, consider the **JR-Kyushu Rail Pass**, valid for 5 days for ¥15,000 (\$125) and for 7 days for ¥20,000 (\$167). Likewise, there's a **Hokkaido Rail Pass** valid for 3 days of travel for ¥14,000 (\$117).

Before You Leave Home The Japan Rail Pass is available only to foreigners visiting Japan as tourists and *can be purchased only outside Japan*. It's available from most travel agents (chances are your travel agent sells them), including the **Japan Travel Bureau** (JTB; ☎ 212/698-4919; www.jtbusa.com). If you're flying **Japan Airlines**

(JAL; ☎ 800/525-3663 in the U.S. and Canada; www.jal.co.jp/en) or All Nippon Airways (ANA; ☎ 800/235-9262 in the U.S. and Canada; www.ana.co.jp), you can also purchase a rail pass from them.

With the exception of the Hokkaido Rail Pass, which may be purchased in Hokkaido only by foreign tourists, you cannot buy a rail pass once you're in Japan, so you must arrange for one before you leave home. You'll be issued a voucher (called an **Exchange Order**), which you'll then exchange for the pass itself after you arrive in Japan. Note that once you purchase your Exchange Order, you must exchange it in Japan for the pass itself within 3 months of the date of issue of the Exchange Order. When obtaining your actual pass, you must then specify the date you wish to start using the pass within a 1-month period.

Once You've Arrived In Japan, you can exchange your voucher for a Japan Rail Pass at more than 40 JR stations that have Japan Rail Pass exchange offices, at which time you must present your passport and specify the date you wish to begin using the pass; most offices are open daily from 10am to 6 or 7pm, some even longer.

At both Narita Airport (daily 6:30am–9:45pm) and Kansai International Airport (daily 5:30am–11pm), you can pick up Japan Rail Passes at either the Travel Service Center or the Ticket Office. Other Travel Service Centers or Ticket Offices, all located in JR train stations, include those at Tokyo (open daily 5:30am–11:30pm), Ueno, Shinjuku, Ikebukuro, and Shibuya stations in Tokyo; Kyoto Station; Shin-Osaka and Osaka stations; and Hiroshima, Sapporo, Okayama, Takamatsu, Matsuyama, Hakata, Nagasaki, Kumamoto, Miyazaki, and Nishi-Kagoshima stations. (Stations and their open hours are listed in a pamphlet you'll receive with your

voucher.) Vouchers can be exchanged for the JR-Kyushu Rail Pass at stations in Kyushu (including Hakata and Nagasaki), while vouchers for the JR East Pass can be exchanged at Narita Airport, many stations in Tokyo, and some stations in Tohoku.

BY PLANE

Because it takes the better part of a day and night to get by train from Tokyo down to southern Kyushu or up to northern Hokkaido, you may find it more convenient to fly at least one stretch of your journey in Japan. You may, for example, fly internationally into Osaka and then onward to Fukuoka on Kyushu, from where you can take a leisurely 2 weeks to travel by train through Kyushu and Honshu before returning to Osaka. I don't, however, advise flying short distances—say, from Tokyo to Osaka—simply because the time spent getting to and from airports is longer and costlier than the time spent traveling by Shinkansen.

Almost all domestic flights from Tokyo leave from the much more conveniently located **Haneda Airport**. If you're already in Tokyo, you can easily reach Haneda Airport via monorail from Hamamatsucho Station on the Yamanote Line. If you're arriving on an international flight at Narita Airport, however, make sure you know whether a connection to a domestic flight is at Narita or requires a transfer to Haneda Airport via the Airport Limousine Bus (see chapter 3 for details). Three major domestic airlines are **Japan Airlines (JAL; ☎ 0120/25-5971 in Japan; see "Getting There,"** earlier in this chapter for U.S. phone numbers; www.jal.co.jp/en); **All Nippon Airways (ANA; ☎ 0120/029-222 in Japan; www.ana.co.jp);** **Japan Air Systems**, which is affiliated with JAL (**JAS; ☎ 0120/51-1283 in Japan; www.jal.co.jp/en);** and **Japan Asia Airways (JAA; ☎ 0120/747-801),**

with networks that stretch all the way from Okinawa to northern Hokkaido. Regular fares are generally the same no matter which airline you fly domestically. However, fares change often, with the most expensive fares charged for peak season including New Year's, Golden Week, and summer vacation. However, bargains do exist. Some flights early in the day or late at night may be cheaper than flights during peak time; you can also save by purchasing tickets in advance (ask carriers for details). If you're flying into Japan via JAL or ANA, purchasing domestic tickets in connection with your international flight can also save you money.

In addition, some small, regional airlines, such as **Skymark** (☎ 0120/057-333 toll-free or 03/3433-7670 in Tokyo, or 092/736-3131 in Fukuoka), operating out of Fukuoka on the island of Kyushu; and **Air Do** (☎ 03/5350-7333 in Tokyo, or 011/200-7333 in Sapporo) out of Sapporo on the island of Hokkaido, sometimes offer cheaper fares than those on JAL or ANA (see chapters 10 and 12). It pays, therefore, to shop around. Although it's subject to change, the regular fare for a one-way flight aboard JAL, ANA, and JAS from Tokyo to Kagoshima (or vice versa) is about ¥33,000 (\$275) during the regular season. JAL, however, offers an evening flight from Kagoshima back to Tokyo for as low as ¥19,500 (\$163) during the regular season. Round-trip tickets are also slightly cheaper. For comparison, a train ticket between the two cities is ¥25,100 (\$209) one-way. Where airline fares are provided in this book, fares are for regular tickets during the regular season. Tickets can be purchased directly through the airline, at **View Plazas** located at major JR train stations, or through a travel agent such as **Japan Travel Bureau (JTB)**, which has offices virtually everywhere in Japan.

Remember, however, that if you know your itinerary in advance, it's cheaper to plan ahead and purchase your domestic flight in conjunction with your international flight to Japan. For example, if you plan to visit Tokyo and Sapporo from Los Angeles, you should purchase a Los Angeles–Sapporo ticket with a Tokyo stopover. Such thoroughfares are available to the following cities from the United States: Tokyo, Osaka, Sapporo, Nagoya, Fukuoka, and Okinawa. If you fly JAL or ANA internationally between North America and Japan, you can save up to 77% on the cost of your inner-Japan domestic flights to 42 cities by purchasing your domestic tickets in conjunction with your international ticket on the same carrier. Contact the airlines directly or through your travel agent and ask for the Welcome to Japan Fare or Visit Japan Fare.

BY BUS

Buses often go where trains don't and thus may be the only way for you to get to the more remote areas of Japan—such as, for example, Shirakawago in the Japan Alps. In Hokkaido, Tohoku, Kyushu, and other places, buses are used extensively.

Some inter-city buses require you to make reservations or purchase your ticket in advance at the ticket counter at the bus terminal. For others (especially local buses), when you board a bus you'll generally find a ticket machine by the entry door. Take a ticket, which is number-coded with a board displayed at the front of the bus. The board shows the various fares, which increase with the distance traveled. You pay your fare when you get off.

In addition to serving the remote areas of the country, **long-distance buses** (called *chokyori basu*) also operate between major cities in Japan and offer the cheapest mode of transportation.

Although **Japan Railways** operates almost a dozen bus routes eligible for JR Rail Pass coverage, the majority of buses are run by private companies. Some long-distance buses travel during the night and offer reclining seats and toilets, thus saving passengers the price of a night's lodging. For example, special buses depart from **Tokyo Station's** Yaesu south side every night for Kyoto (¥8,180/\$68), Osaka (¥8,610/\$72), Hiroshima (¥12,060/\$100), Matsuyama (¥12,000/\$100), and Takamatsu (¥10,000/\$83), arriving at those cities' main train stations the next morning. Night buses also depart from **Shinjuku Station's** new south exit or from the **Shinjuku Highway Bus Terminal** (a 3-min. walk from Shinjuku Station's west exit) bound for Kyoto, Nagoya, Okayama, Kurashiki, and Hakata. Night buses also travel from these cities in reverse back to Tokyo. Slight discounts are given for round-trip travel completed within 6 to 10 days, depending on the city. A round-trip ticket to Hiroshima, for example, costs ¥22,000 (\$183) if completed within 7 days, compared to ¥12,060 (\$100) one-way. There are also limited day buses traveling from Tokyo's Shinjuku Station to Kyoto Station for ¥6,000 (\$50). Long-distance bus tickets can be purchased at View Plazas at major JR stations (for JR buses) or at travel agencies such as JTB.

For more information on local and long-distance bus service, refer to individual cities covered in this guide or contact the **Tourist Information Center** in Tokyo or Kyoto (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter).

BY CAR

With the exception, perhaps, of Izu Peninsula, the Tohoku region, and Hokkaido, driving is not recommended for visitors wishing to tour Japan. Driving is British style (on the left side of the road), which may be hard for those not used to it; traffic can

be horrendous; and driving isn't even economical. Not only is gas expensive (about ¥115 for 1 liter, or approximately 96¢ for a quarter of a gal.), but all of Japan's expressways charge high tolls—the one-way toll from Tokyo to Kyoto is almost the same price as a ticket to Kyoto on the Shinkansen. And whereas the Shinkansen takes only 3 hours to get to Kyoto, driving takes about 8 hours. In addition, you may encounter few signs in English in remote areas. Driving in cities is even worse: Streets are often hardly wide enough for a rickshaw, let alone a car, and many roads don't have sidewalks so you have to dodge people, bicycles, and telephone poles. Free parking is hard to find, and garages are expensive. Except in remote areas, it just doesn't make sense to drive.

There are approximately a dozen major car-rental companies in Tokyo alone, with branch offices throughout the city and at the Narita Airport, including **Nippon Rent-A-Car Service** (☎ 03/3485-7196 for the English Service Desk), **Toyota Rent-A-Car** (☎ 03/5954-8008 in Tokyo, or 0070-8000-10000 toll-free), **Nissan Rent-A-Car** (☎ 0120/00-4123), and **Avis** (☎ 03/5397-8915); these companies also have branches throughout Japan. In almost every city with a JR train station, there is also a **JR Eki Rent-A-Car** office, offering 20% discounts on car rentals booked in conjunction with train tickets; you can reserve these cars at any JR Travel Service Center (located in train stations) anywhere in Japan. Rates vary, but the average cost for 24 hours with unlimited mileage ranges from ¥6,000 to ¥13,000 (\$50–\$108) for a subcompact including insurance but not gas; in some tourist areas, such as Hokkaido, rates are more expensive in peak season.

If you do intend to drive in Japan, you'll need either an **international** or a **Japanese driving license**. Remember, cars are driven on the left side of

the road, and signs on all major highways are written in both Japanese and English. It is against the law to drink alcohol and drive, and you must wear seat belts at all times. Be sure to purchase a bilingual map, since back roads often have names of towns written in Japanese only. Recommended is the *Shobunsha Road Atlas Japan*, available in bookstores with English books and with maps of major cities as well, including Tokyo, Sapporo, Hiroshima, and others.

BREAKDOWNS/ASSISTANCE

The **Japan Automobile Federation (JAF)** maintains emergency telephone boxes along Japan's major arteries to assist drivers whose cars have broken

down or drivers who need help. Calls from these telephones are free and will connect you to JAF's operation center.

BY FERRY

Because Japan is an island nation, an extensive ferry network links the string of islands. Although travel by ferry takes longer, it's also cheaper and can be a pleasant, relaxing experience. For example, you can take a ferry from Osaka to Beppu (on Kyushu), with fares starting at ¥7,400 (\$62) for the 11-hour trip. Contact the **Tourist Information Center** (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter) for more details concerning ferries, prices, schedules, and telephone numbers of the various ferry companies.

12 Tips on Accommodations

Accommodations available in Japan range from inexpensive Japanese-style inns to large Western-style hotels. Although you can travel throughout Japan without making reservations beforehand, it's essential to book in advance if you're traveling during peak travel seasons, and advance booking is recommended at other times (see "When to Go," earlier in this chapter for peak travel times). If you arrive in a town without reservations, most local tourist offices—generally located in or near the main train station—will find accommodations for you at no extra charge. Note that in popular resort areas, most accommodations raise their rates during peak times. Some also charge more on weekends.

A note on reservations: When making reservations, especially at Japanese-style accommodations, it's best if the call is conducted in Japanese or by fax or e-mail if available, as written English is always easier for most Japanese to understand.

A note about taxes: In figuring out your bill, remember that a 5% consumption tax will be added (some business hotels and inexpensive inns

include the tax in their rates); in addition, Tokyo levies its own accommodation tax (see chapter 3). There will also be a 10% to 15% service charge added to your bill in upper-end hotels, while expensive ryokan will add a 10% to 20% service charge (sometimes included in room rates). No service charge is levied at business hotels, pensions, and minshuku for the simple reason that no services are provided. Unless otherwise stated, tax and service charges are not included in room rates quoted in this book.

JAPANESE-STYLE INNS

A stay at a traditional ryokan or Japanese inn can prove very expensive. Yet the unique experience makes it worthwhile, for nothing quite conveys the simplicity and beauty—indeed the very atmosphere—of old Japan more than these inns with their gleaming polished wood, tatami floors, rice-paper sliding doors, and meticulously pruned gardens. Personalized service by kimono-clad hostesses and exquisitely prepared kaiseki meals are the trademarks of such inns, some of which are of ancient vintage. Indeed,

staying in one is like taking a trip back in time.

If you want to experience a Japanese-style inn but can't afford the prices of a full-service ryokan, a number of alternatives are described below. Although they don't offer the same personalized service, beautiful setting, or memorable cuisine, they do offer the chance to stay in a simple tatami room, sleep on a futon and, in some cases, eat Japanese meals. As at a ryokan, prices are per person and often include two meals. English, however, is rarely spoken.

RYOKAN Ryokan developed during the Edo Period, when *daimyo* (feudal lords) were required to travel to and from Edo (present-day Tokyo) every 2 years. They always traveled with a full entourage including members of their family, retainers, and servants. The best ryokan, of course, were reserved for the daimyo and members of the imperial family. Some of these exist today, passed down from generation to generation.

Traditionally, ryokan are small, only one or two stories high, contain about 10 to 30 rooms, and are made of wood with a tile roof. Most guests arrive at their ryokan around 3 or 4pm. The entrance is often through a gate and small garden; upon entering, you're met by a bowing woman in a kimono. Take off your shoes, slide on the proffered plastic slippers, and follow your hostess down the long wooden corridors until you reach the sliding door of your room. After taking off your slippers, step into your tatami room, which is almost void of furniture. What you'll find is a low table in the middle of the room, floor cushions, an antique scroll hanging in an alcove (*tokonoma*), a simple flower arrangement, and, best of all, a view past rice-paper sliding screens of a Japanese landscaped garden with bonsai, stone lanterns, and a meandering pond filled with carp. Notice there's no bed in the room.

Almost immediately, your hostess serves you welcoming hot tea and a sweet at your low table so you can sit there for a while, recuperate from your travels, and appreciate the view, the peace, and the solitude. Next comes your hot bath, either in your own room (if you have one in your room) or in the communal bath. Since many ryokan are clustered around hot springs (*onsen*), many offer the additional luxury of bathing in thermal baths, including outdoor baths. (For bathing, be sure to follow the procedure outlined in "Minding Your Ps & Qs," in appendix A—soaping and rinsing *before* getting into the tub.) After bathing and soaking away all tension, aches, and pains, change into your *yukata*, a cotton kimono provided by the ryokan.

When you return to your room, you'll find the maid ready to serve your kaiseki dinner, an elaborate spread that is the highlight of a ryokan stay. It generally consists of locally grown vegetables, sashimi (raw fish), grilled or baked fish, tempura, and various regional specialties, all spread out on many tiny plates; the menu is determined by the chef. Admire how each dish is in itself a delicate piece of artwork; it all looks too wonderful to eat, but finally hunger takes over. If you want, you can order sake or beer to accompany your meal (but you'll pay extra for drinks).

After you've finished eating, your maid will return to clear away the dishes and to lay out your bed. The bed is really a futon, a kind of mattress with quilts, and it is laid out on the tatami floor. The next morning, the maid will wake you, put away the futon, and serve a breakfast of fish, pickled vegetables, soup, dried seaweed, rice, and a raw egg to be mixed with the rice. Feeling rested, well fed, and pampered, you're then ready to pack your bags and pay your bill. Your hostess sees you off at the front gate,

smiling and bowing as you set off for the rest of your travels.

Such is life at a good ryokan. Sadly, however, the number of upper-class ryokan diminishes each year. Unable to compete with more profitable high-rise hotels in these days of recession, many ryokan in Japan have closed down, especially in large cities; very few remain in such cities as Tokyo and Osaka. If you want to stay in a Japanese inn, it's best to do so in Kyoto or at a resort or hot-spring spa. Altogether, there are approximately 65,000 ryokan still operating in Japan in a variety of different price ranges.

In addition, although ideally a ryokan is an old wooden structure that once served traveling daimyo or was perhaps the home of a wealthy merchant, many today—especially those in hot-spring resort areas—are actually modern concrete affairs with as many as 100 or more rooms. Meals are served in dining rooms. What they lack in intimacy and personal service, however, is made up for with slightly cheaper prices and such amenities as modern bathing facilities and perhaps a bar and outdoor recreational facilities. Most guest rooms are fitted with a color TV, a telephone, a safe for locking up valuables, and a cotton yukata, as well as such amenities as soap, shampoo, a razor, a toothbrush, and toothpaste.

Rates are per person rather than per room and include breakfast, dinner, and often a service charge; tax is extra. Thus, while rates may seem high, they're actually competitively priced compared to what you'd pay for a hotel room and comparable meals in a restaurant. Although rates can vary from ¥9,000 to an astonishing ¥150,000 (\$75–\$1,250) per person, the average cost is generally ¥12,000 to ¥20,000 (\$100–\$167). Even within a single ryokan the rates can vary greatly, depending on the room you choose, the dinner courses you select,

and the number of people in your room. If you're paying the highest rate, you can be certain you're getting the best room, the best view of the garden or perhaps even your own private garden, and a much more elaborate meal than lower-paying guests. All the rates for ryokan in this book are based on double occupancy; if there are more than two of you in one room, you can generally count on a slightly lower per-person rate; small children who sleep in the same bed as their parents often receive a discount as well. Although most Japanese would never dream of checking into an exclusive ryokan solo, lone travelers may be able to secure a room if it's not peak season.

Although I heartily recommend you try spending at least 1 night in a ryokan, there are a number of **disadvantages** to this style of accommodation. The most obvious problem is that you may find it uncomfortable sitting on the floor. And because the futon is put away during the day, there's no place to lie down for an afternoon nap or rest, except on the hard, tatami-covered floor. In addition, some of the older ryokan, though quaint, are bitterly cold in the winter and may have only Japanese-style toilets. As for breakfast, you might find it difficult to swallow raw egg, rice, and seaweed in the morning. (I've even been served grilled grasshopper—quite crunchy.) Sometimes you can get a Western-style breakfast if you order it the night before, but more often than not the fried or scrambled eggs will arrive cold, leading you to suspect they were cooked right after you ordered them.

A ryokan is also quite rigid in its **schedule**. You're expected to arrive sometime between 3 and 5pm, take your bath, and then eat at around 6 or 7pm. Breakfast is served early, usually by 8am, and checkout is by 10am. That means you can't sleep in, and because the maid is continually

coming in and out, you have a lot less privacy than you would in a hotel.

Another drawback of the ryokan is that some will not take you. They simply do not want to deal with the problems inherent in accepting a foreign guest, including the language barrier and differing customs. I've seen a number of beautiful old ryokan I'd like to include in this book, but I've been turned away at the door. Sadly, I've also lost ryokan that once accepted foreigners but have stopped doing so following unacceptable behavior (such as climbing in the window at midnight). On the bright side, the recession has convinced other ryokan to open their doors to foreigners for the first time. In any case, those recommended in the pages that follow do welcome Westerners.

You should always make a **reservation** if you want to stay in a first-class ryokan (and even in most medium-priced ones), because the chef has to shop for and prepare your meals. The ryokan staff members often do not look kindly upon unannounced strangers turning up on their doorstep (though I did this on a weekday trip to Nikko without any problems at all). You can make a reservation for a ryokan through any travel agency in Japan or by calling, faxing, or—very rarely—e-mailing a ryokan directly. You may be required to pay a deposit. For more information on ryokan in Japan, including destinations not covered in this guide, pick up the *Japan Ryokan Guide* at one of the Tourist Information Centers in Japan, which lists some 1,600 members of the **Japan Ryokan Association** (☎ 03/3231-5310); or go online at www.ryokan.or.jp.

MINSHUKU Technically, a *minshuku* is inexpensive Japanese-style lodging in a private home—the Japanese version of a bed-and-breakfast. Minshuku can range from thatched farmhouses and rickety old wooden

buildings to modern concrete structures often located in resort and tourist areas and generally including two meals in their rates. Because minshuku are family-run affairs, there's no personal service, which means you're expected to lay out your own futon at night, stow it away in the morning, and tidy up your room. Most also do not supply a towel or yukata, nor do they have rooms with a private bathroom. There is, however, a public bathroom, and meals are served in a communal dining room. And since minshuku cater primarily to Japanese travelers, they're often excellent places to meet the locals.

Officially, what differentiates a ryokan from a minshuku is the level of service and corresponding price, but the differences are sometimes very slight. I've stayed in cheap ryokan providing almost no service and in minshuku too large and modern to be considered private homes. The average per-person cost for 1 night in a minshuku is generally ¥7,000 to ¥9,000 (\$58–\$75) and includes two meals.

Reservations for minshuku should be made directly with the establishment. Or, contact the **Japan Minshuku Center** (☎ 03/3216-6558; www.koyado.net/english.html) for a reservation in one of its 3,000 member minshuku throughout Japan. Accommodations are for a minimum of two people, and a small handling fee of ¥300 to ¥500 (\$2.50–\$4.15) is charged for each reservation.

KOKUMIN SHUKUSHA A *kokumin shukusha* can be translated as a People's Lodge—public lodging found primarily in national parks and resort and vacation areas. Established by the government, there are more than 300 of these facilities throughout Japan. Catering largely to Japanese school groups and families, they offer basic, Japanese-style rooms at an average daily rate of about ¥6,500 (\$54) per person, including two meals. Although

you don't have to have a reservation to stay in these places, they're usually full during the summer and peak seasons. Reservations can be made through a travel agency; many are also in the *Directory of Welcome Inns* (see "Finding a Hotel or Inn," below). The drawback to many of these lodges is that, because they're often located in national parks and scenic spots, the best way to reach them is by car.

SHUKUBO These are lodgings in a Buddhist temple, similar to inexpensive ryokan, except they're attached to temples and serve vegetarian food. There's usually an early-morning service at 6am, which you're welcome—in some *shukubo*, required—to join. Probably the best place to experience life in a temple is at Mount Koya (see chapter 8). Prices at *shukubo* generally range from about ¥7,000 to ¥15,000 (\$50–\$125) per person, including two meals.

WESTERN-STYLE ACCOMMODATIONS

Western-style lodgings range from large first-class hotels to inexpensive ones catering primarily to Japanese businessmen.

When selecting and reserving your hotel room, call or fax the hotel directly to inquire about rates, even if a toll-free 800 number is provided; sometimes there are special packages, such as weekend or honeymoon packages, that central reservations desks will not be aware of. Special rates are also often available only through the hotel's website. Always ask what kinds of rooms are available. Almost all hotels in Japan offer a wide range of rooms at various prices; room size is the most important factor in pricing. Rooms with views—whether of the sea or a castle—are also generally more expensive, as are rooms on higher floors. In Japan, a **twin room** refers to a room with twin beds, and a **double room** refers to one with a double bed;

most hotels charge more for a twin room, but others charge more for doubles. Some of the upper-priced hotels also offer executive floors, which are generally on the highest floors and offer such perks as a private lounge with separate check-in, more in-room amenities such as fax machines or high-speed dataports, complimentary breakfast and evening cocktails, extended checkout time, and privileges that can include free use of the health club.

Once you decide on the type of room you want, ask for the best in that category. For example, if you want a standard room, and deluxe rooms start on the 14th floor, ask for a standard on the 13th floor. In addition, be specific about the kind of room you want, whether it's a nonsmoking room, a room with a view of Mount Fuji, or a room with a dataport for your computer modem.

Be sure to give your approximate time of arrival, especially if it's after 6pm when they might give your room away. Check-in ranges from about noon or 1pm for first-class hotels to 3 or 4pm for business hotels. Checkout is generally about 10am for business hotels and 11am or noon for upper-range hotels. In any case, it's perfectly acceptable to leave your luggage with the front desk or the bell captain if you arrive early or want to sightsee after checking out.

HOTELS Both first-class and medium-priced hotels in Japan are known for excellent service and cleanliness. The first-class hotels in the larger cities can compete with the best hotels in the world and offer a **wide range of services**, from health clubs and massage services to business centers and restaurant and shopping arcades. Unfortunately, health clubs and swimming pools usually cost extra—anywhere from ¥2,000 to an outrageous ¥5,000 (\$17–\$42) per single use. In addition, outdoor pools are

Value Tips for Saving on Your Hotel Room

Although Japanese hotels have traditionally remained pretty loyal to their published **rack rates**, which are always available at the front desk, the recession has opened possibilities for bargains.

- **Always ask politely whether a room less expensive than the first one mentioned is available.** Since there are usually many categories, ask what the difference is, say, between a standard twin and a superior twin. If there are two of you, ask whether a double or a twin room is cheaper. Ask whether there are corporate discounts. Find out the hotel's policy on children—do children stay free in the room or is there a special rate?
- **Dial direct.** When booking a room in a chain hotel, call the hotel's local line as well as the toll-free number to see where you get the best deal.
- **Check the Internet.** If the hotel has a website, check to see whether discounts or special promotions are offered. Some hotels offer discounts exclusively through the Internet.
- **Ask about promotions and special plans.** Hotels frequently offer special "plans," including "Spring Plans," "Ladies' Plans," and even "Shopping Plans" that provide cheaper rates and services.
- **Remember the law of supply and demand.** Resort hotels are more crowded and therefore more expensive on weekends and during peak travel periods such as Golden Week. Discounts, therefore, are often available for midweek and off-season stays.
- **Ask about hotel membership plans.** Some chain business hotels offer hotel memberships with discounts on meals and free stays after a certain number of nights. Others, such as the New Otani, Okura, and the Imperial in Tokyo, allow free use of the hotel swimming pool simply if you become a member at no extra charge. Inquire at the front desk.
- **Ask the local tourist office whether there's a Welcome Card.** Eight tourist regions around Japan, including Kagawa Prefecture (Shikoku), Fukuoka, Aomori Prefecture (Tohoku District), and Hiroshima, offer a free **Welcome Card** to foreign visitors that provides discounts on room rates in participating hotels. Find out more about Welcome Cards at JNTO's website (www.jnto.go.jp/eng/GJ/BTG/welcome_cards.html).

generally open only in July and August. Rooms in upper-range hotels and many moderate hotels in large cities catering to tourists come with such **standard features** as a minibar, bilingual cable TV with pay movies and English channels like CNN or BBC, a clock, a radio, cotton kimono,

a hot-water pot and tea (and occasionally coffee, though you usually have to pay extra for it), a hair dryer, and a private bathroom with a tub-and-shower combination. (Since Japanese are used to soaping down and rinsing off before bathing, it would be rare to find tubs without showers; similarly,

showers without tubs are practically nonexistent in this nation of bathers.) Most hotels nowadays also have “washlet” toilets, which are combination toilets and spray bidets with a controllable range of speeds and temperatures. Because they’re accustomed to foreigners, most hotels in this category employ an English-speaking staff and offer nonsmoking floors or rooms. Services provided include room service, same-day laundry and dry cleaning, and English-language newspapers (often complimentary) delivered to your room. Note that in medium-range hotels, same-day laundry service is not available Sundays and holidays and you must turn in your laundry by 10am to receive it by 5pm that day.

The most expensive hotels in Japan are in Tokyo, where you’ll pay at least ¥26,000 (\$216) for a double or twin room in a first-class hotel and ¥14,000 to ¥25,000 (\$117–\$208) for the same in a medium-priced hotel. Outside the major cities, rooms for two people generally range from about ¥16,000 to ¥20,000 (\$133–\$167) for first-class hotels and ¥12,000 to ¥15,000 (\$100–\$125) for medium-priced hotels.

Although some internationally known chains have a presence in Japan, including Four Seasons (www.fourseasons.com), Hilton (www.hilton.com), Hyatt (www.hyatt.com), Holiday Inn (www.holiday-inn.com), Marriott (www.Marriott.com), Radisson (www.radisson.com), Ritz-Carlton (www.ritzcarlton.com), and Westin (www.starwood.com/westin/index.html), Japanese chains naturally dominate. ANA (associated with All Nippon Airways; www.anahotels.com), New Otani (www1.newotani.co.jp/en), Nikko (associated with Japan Airlines; www.nikkohotels.com), and Prince (www.princehotels.co.jp) are some of the top names.

In addition to the hotel recommendations in this guide, you can also check out the more than 300 members

of the Japan Hotel Association listed in the brochure *Hotels in Japan* available from the Tourist Information Centers in Japan or online at www.j-hotel.or.jp/welcome-e.html.

BUSINESS HOTELS Catering primarily to traveling Japanese businessmen, a “business hotel” is a no-frills establishment with tiny, sparsely furnished rooms, most of them singles but usually with some twin or double rooms also available. Primarily just places to crash for the night, these rooms usually have everything you need, but in miniature form—minuscule bathroom, tiny bathtub/shower, small bed (or beds), and barely enough space to unpack your bags. If you’re a large person, you may have trouble sleeping in a place like this. There are no bellhops, no room service, and sometimes not even a lobby or coffee shop, although usually there are vending machines selling beer, soda, cigarettes, and snacks. Usually, business hotels do not have nonsmoking rooms, though this is slowly changing. The advantages of staying in business hotels are price—starting as low as ¥6,000 or ¥7,000 (\$50 or \$58) for a single—and location—usually near major train and subway stations. Check-in is usually not until 3 or 4pm, and checkout is usually at 10am; you can leave your bags at the front desk.

The most sophisticated business hotels are in Tokyo, where, because of high prices, they make up the bulk of medium-priced accommodations. Some business hotels also offer membership clubs for frequent guests. Sunroute (www.sunroute.jp), for example, has a membership club you can join for ¥1,000 (\$8.35), which gives a 15% to 30% discount on hotel rates depending on the day of the week, a 10% discount on its restaurants after 5pm, and a late 3pm checkout. When making your reservation, ask whether such a membership is available. Other

chain business hotels to look for include Tokyu (www.tokyuhotels.co.jp) and Toyoko Inn (www.toyoko-inn.co.jp).

For a short list of business hotels in Japan, check the Japan City Hotel Association's list at www.jcha.or.jp. Another good site is www.mytrip.net/en/index.html, Japan's largest online hotel reservation company for budget and moderately priced accommodations.

PENSIONS Pensions are like *minshuku*, except that accommodations are Western-style with beds instead of futons, and the two meals served are usually Western. Often managed by a young couple or a young staff, they cater to young Japanese and are most often located in ski resorts and in the countryside, sometimes making access a problem. Averaging 10 guest rooms, many seem especially geared to young Japanese women and are thus done up in rather feminine-looking decor with lots of pinks and flower prints. The average cost is ¥8,000 to ¥10,000 (\$67–\$83) per person per night, including two meals.

YOUTH HOSTELS There are some 350 youth hostels in Japan, most of them privately run and operating in locations ranging from temples to concrete blocks. There's no age limit (though children younger than 4 may not be accepted), and although most of them require a youth hostel membership card from the Japan Youth Hostel Association, they let foreigners stay without one at no extra charge or for ¥600 (\$5) extra per night (after 6 nights you automatically become a YH member). Youth hostels are reasonable, costing about ¥3,500 (\$29) per day including two meals, and can be reserved in advance. However, there are usually quite a few restrictions, such as a 9 or 10pm curfew, a lights-out policy shortly thereafter, an early breakfast time, and closed times through the day, generally from about

10am to 3pm. In addition, rooms generally have many bunk beds or futons, affording little privacy. On the other hand, they're certainly the cheapest accommodations in Japan.

Because youth hostels are often inconveniently located, I have included only a couple in this guide, but if you plan on staying almost exclusively in hostels, pick up a pamphlet called "Youth Hostel Map of Japan," available at the **Tourist Information Centers** in Tokyo, Kyoto, and Narita and Kansai airports; or check www.jyh.or.jp. You should also get a youth hostel membership card. In the U.S., contact **Hostelling International/American Youth Hostels**, 733 15th St. NW, Suite 840, Washington, DC 20005 (☎ 202/783-6161; www.hiayh.org), which also offers a directory of low-cost accommodations around the country and abroad. Cards cost \$25 for adults, \$15 for seniors older than 54, and are free for children younger than 17.

CAPSULE HOTELS Capsule hotels, which became popular in the early 1980s, are used primarily by Japanese businessmen who have spent an evening out drinking and missed the last train home—costing about ¥3,000 to ¥4,000 (\$25–\$33) per person, a capsule hotel is sometimes cheaper than a taxi to the suburbs. The units are small—no larger than a coffin and consisting of a bed, a private color TV, an alarm clock, and a radio—and are usually stacked two deep in rows down a corridor; the only thing separating you from your probably inebriated neighbor is a curtain. A cotton kimono and a locker are provided, and baths and toilets are communal. Most capsule hotels do not accept women.

INTERNATIONAL VILLAS International Villas are such a great deal for foreigners that I want to give them special mention here. These small country inns are financed and maintained by

the Okayama prefectural government and are open only to foreigners, although accompanying Japanese guests are welcome. Each villa is small, with a half dozen or so guest rooms (usually without private bathroom), and is equipped with public bathroom and kitchen facilities. No meals are served, but you can cook your own or visit one of the local restaurants. There are six International Villas, most of them in small villages or rural settings: Fukiya, Koshihata (currently closed), Ushimado, Hattoji, Shiraishi Island, and Takebe. Most rooms are Western-style twins, but some Japanese-style rooms are also available. The cost of staying at one of the villas is ¥3,000 (\$25) per person for nonmembers and ¥2,500 (\$21) for members. To become a member, simply pay ¥500 (\$4.15) for a membership card upon check-in at any villa. For more information, see “Okayama: Gateway to Shikoku,” in chapter 8.

LOVE HOTELS Finally, a word about Japan’s so-called “love hotels.” Usually found close to entertainment districts and along major highways, such hotels do not provide sexual services themselves; rather, they offer rooms for rent by the hour to couples. Altogether, there are an estimated 35,000 such love hotels, usually gaudy structures shaped like ocean liners or castles and offering such extras as rotating beds and mirrored walls. You’ll know that you’ve wandered into a love-hotel district when you notice hourly rates posted near the front door.

FINDING A HOTEL OR INN

If you find all my recommendations for a certain city fully booked, or if you’re traveling to destinations not covered in this guide, there are several ways to find alternative accommodations. High-end hotels and ryokan can be booked through travel agencies in Japan, including the ubiquitous Japan

Travel Bureau. For low-cost lodgings such as *minshuku* and business hotels, however, you’ll have to turn to other places for help.

ONLINE DIRECTORIES In addition to the resources mentioned above for ryokan (www.ryokan.or.jp) and for hotels (www.j-hotel.or.jp/welcome-e.html for members of the Japan Hotel Association, www.jcha.or.jp for business hotels), other online resources are listed on the website of the Japan National Tourist Organization (www.jnto.go.jp; click “Places to Stay,” then “Links”), including www.mytrip.net/en/index.html, Japan’s largest online reservation site for budget accommodations, and Welcome Inns and Japanese Inn Group members, described below.

WELCOME INNS For budget accommodations, at the top of my list are those that are members of **Welcome Inns**. Some 700 modestly priced hotels and Japanese-style inns throughout Japan are members of Welcome Inns (several of which are also recommended in this book). Room rates are ¥8,000 (\$67) or less for a single and ¥13,000 (\$108) or less for a double. No fee is charged for the reservation service, though you are asked to guarantee your reservation with a credit card.

You can book a reservation at Welcome Inns through the Internet at www.itcj.or.jp (reservations should be made at least 1 week prior to your departure; proof of a confirmed flight is required). Otherwise, contact your nearest Japan National Tourist Organization office (see “Visitor Information,” earlier in this chapter) and request the *Directory of Welcome Inns*, which not only lists all the properties but also contains a reservation request form that you should then fax 1 week prior to your departure or mail 2 weeks prior to your departure to the Tokyo TIC; you’ll then receive a

confirmation slip and detailed information and access maps to your selected accommodations.

If you're already in Japan, you can apply by mailing, faxing, or e-mailing your reservation request form (telephone reservations are not accepted) or by appearing in person at one of the four TIC offices during the following hours:

- **Tokyo TIC**, 10th floor of the Tokyo Kotsukaikan Building, 2-10-1 Yurakucho (reservations accepted Mon-Fri 9-11:30am and 1-4:45pm)
- **Narita Airport TIC**, in the arrival lobbies or Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 (daily 9am-7:30pm)
- **Kyoto TIC**, a minute's walk from Kyoto Station's north side (take the Karasuma central exit) at the Kyoto Tower Building, Higashi-Shiokojicho, Shimogyo-ku (Mon-Fri 9-11:30am and 1-4:30pm)
- **Kansai International Airport TIC**, Osaka, at the north end of the International Arrivals Lobby (daily 9am-8:30pm)

The Tokyo and Kyoto TIC Welcome Inn Reservation Centers are closed on public holidays.

JAPANESE INN GROUP In addition to Welcome Inns, there's another great organization called the Japanese Inn Group, a special organization of more than 80 Japanese-style inns and hotels throughout Japan offering inexpensive lodging and catering largely to foreigners. Although you may balk at the idea of staying at a place filled mainly with foreigners, remember that many inexpensive Japanese-style inns are not accustomed to guests from abroad and may be quite reluctant to take you in. I have covered many of these Japanese Inn Group members in this guidebook through the years and have found the owners for the most part to be an exceptional group of friendly people eager to offer foreigners

the chance to experience life on tatami mats and futons. In many cases, these are good places in which to exchange information with other world travelers, and they are popular with both young people and families.

Although many of the group members call themselves *ryokan*, they are not *ryokan* in the true sense of the word because they don't offer personalized service and many of them don't serve food. However, they do offer simple tatami rooms that generally come with a TV and an air conditioner (occasionally both are coin-operated); most also have towels and a cotton *yukata* robe for your use. Some offer Western-style rooms as well, and though rooms without a private bathroom are more common, some do offer private bathrooms. Facilities generally include a coin-operated washer and dryer and a public bathroom. The average cost of a 1-night stay is about ¥4,500 to ¥7,500 (\$38-\$63) per person without meals. Breakfast is usually available for an extra charge; dinner is also sometimes available.

You can view member inns at www.jpinn.com. Or, upon your arrival in Japan, head to one of the four Tourist Information Centers (see above), where you can pick up a pamphlet called "Japanese Inn Group," which lists the members of this organization. You should make reservations directly with the *ryokan* in which you wish to stay (most have faxes and many have e-mail). In some cases, you'll be asked to pay a deposit (equal to 1 night's stay), which you can do with a personal check, traveler's check, money order, or bank check, but the easiest way is with American Express. For more information, contact the Inn Group's headquarters at Ryokan Asakusa Shigetsu, 1-31-11 Nishi-Asakusa, Taito-ku, Tokyo 111-0032 (☎ 03/3843-2345); there's also a Kyoto office at Hiraiwa Ryokan, 314, Hayao-cho, Kaminoguchi-agaru,

Ninomiyacho-dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8114 (☎ 075/351-6748). Some member inns belong to the Welcome Inn group as well, which means you can also make reservations through one of the methods described earlier.

LOCAL RESERVATION AGENTS

If you arrive at your destination and then discover you need help obtaining accommodations, you may inquire about a place to stay at the hotel and ryokan reservation office or the tourist information office, both found in

most train stations. Although policies may differ from office to office, you generally don't have to pay a fee for their services, but you usually do have to pay a percentage of your overnight charge as a deposit. The disadvantage is that you don't see the locale beforehand, and if there's space left at a ryokan even in peak tourist season, there may be a reason for it. Although these offices can be a real lifesaver in a pinch and in most cases may be able to recommend quite reasonable and pleasant places in which to stay, it certainly pays to plan in advance.

13 Tips on Dining, Japanese Style

Whenever I leave Japan, it's the food I miss the most. Sure, there are sushi bars and other Japanese specialty restaurants in many major cities around the world, but they don't offer nearly the variety available in Japan (and often they aren't nearly as good). For just as America has more to offer than hamburgers and steaks and England more than fish and chips, Japan has more than just sushi and teppanyaki. For both the gourmet and the uninitiated, Japan is a treasure trove of culinary surprises.

JAPANESE CUISINE

Altogether, there are more than a dozen different and distinct types of Japanese cuisine, plus countless regional specialties. A good deal of what you eat may be completely new to you as well as completely unidentifiable. Sometimes the Japanese themselves don't even know what they're eating, so varied and so wide is the range of available edibles. The rule is simply to enjoy.

To the Japanese, **presentation** of food is as important as the food itself, and dishes are designed to appeal not only to the palate but to the eye. In contrast to the American way of piling as much food as possible onto a single plate, the Japanese use lots of small plates, each arranged artfully with bite-size morsels of food.

Below are explanations of some of the most common types of Japanese cuisine. Generally, only one type of cuisine is served in a given restaurant—for example, only raw seafood is served in a sushi bar, whereas tempura is featured at a tempura counter. There are exceptions to this, especially in those restaurants where raw fish may be served as an appetizer. In addition, some Japanese drinking establishments (called *izakaya* or *nomiya*) offer a wide range of foods from soups to sushi to skewered pieces of chicken known as *yakitori*.

For a quick rundown of the various types of Japanese foods and individual

Tips Taxes

Keep in mind that restaurants will add a 5% tax to your bill. First-class restaurants will also add a 10% to 15% service charge, as do most hotel restaurants.

dishes, refer to the menu terms in appendix B.

FUGU Known as blowfish, pufferfish, or globefish in English, fugu is one of the most exotic and adventurous foods in Japan—if it's not prepared properly, it means almost certain death for the consumer. In the past decade, some 50 people in Japan have died from fugu poisoning, usually because they tried preparing it at home. The fugu's ovaries and intestines are deadly and must be entirely removed without puncturing them. So why eat fugu if it can kill you? Well, for one thing, it's delicious; for another, fugu chefs are strictly licensed by the government and are greatly skilled in preparing fugu dishes. Ways to order it include raw (*fugu-sashi*), when it's sliced paper-thin and dipped into soy sauce with bitter orange and chives; in a stew (*fugu-chiri*) cooked with vegetables at your table; and as a rice porridge (*fugu-zosui*). The season for fresh fugu is October or November through March, but some restaurants serve it throughout the year.

KAISEKI The king of Japanese cuisine, kaiseki is the epitome of delicately and exquisitely arranged food, the ultimate in Japanese aesthetic appeal. It's also among the most expensive meals you can eat and can cost ¥25,000 (\$208) or more per person; some restaurants, however, do offer more affordable mini-kaiseki courses. In addition, the better ryokan (Japanese inns) serve meals kaiseki-style, which is a primary reason staying in one costs so much. Kaiseki, which is not a specific dish but rather a complete meal, is expensive because much time and skill are involved in preparing each of the many dishes, with the ingredients cooked to preserve natural flavors. Even the plates are chosen with great care to enhance the color, texture, and shape of each piece of food.

Kaiseki cuisine is based on the four seasons, with the selection of food and its presentation dependent on the time of the year. In fact, so strongly does a kaiseki preparation convey the mood of a particular season, the kaiseki gourmet can tell what season it is just by looking at a meal.

A kaiseki meal is usually a lengthy affair with various dishes appearing in set order. First come the appetizer, clear broth, and one uncooked dish. These are followed by boiled, broiled, fried, steamed, heated, and vinegared dishes and finally by another soup, rice, pickled vegetables, and fruit. Although meals vary greatly depending upon the region and what's fresh, common dishes include some type of sashimi, tempura, cooked seasonal fish, and bite-size pieces of various vegetables. Since kaiseki is always a set meal, there's no problem in ordering. Let your budget be your guide.

KUSHIAGE Kushiage foods are breaded and deep-fried on skewers and include chicken, beef, seafood, and lots of seasonal vegetables (snow peas, green pepper, ginkgo nuts, lotus root, and the like). They're served with a slice of lemon and usually a specialty sauce. The result is delicious, and I highly recommend trying it. You'll find it at shops called *kushiage-ya* (ya means "shop"), which are often open only at night, like yakitori-ya. Ordering the set meal is easiest, and what you get is often determined by both the chef and the season.

OKONOMIYAKI *Okonomiyaki*, which originated in Osaka after World War II and literally means "as you like it," is often referred to as Japanese pizza. To me, it's more like a pancake to which meat or fish, shredded cabbage, and vegetables are added, topped with Worcestershire sauce. Since it's a popular offering of street vendors, restaurants specializing in this type of cuisine are very reasonably priced. At

some places the cook makes it for you, but at other places it's do-it-yourself, which can be quite fun if you're with a group. *Yakisoba* (fried Chinese noodles and cabbage) are also usually on offer at *okonomiyaki* restaurants.

RICE As in other Asian countries, rice has been a Japanese staple for about 2,000 years. In fact, rice is so important to the Japanese diet that *gohan* means both "rice" and "meal." There are no problems here—everyone is familiar with rice. The difference, however, is that in Japan it's quite sticky, making it easier to pick up with chopsticks. It's also just plain white rice—no salt, no butter, no soy sauce (it's thought to be rather uncouth to dump a lot of sauces in your rice). In the old days, not everyone could afford the expensive white kind, which was grown primarily to pay taxes or rent to the feudal lord; the peasants had to be satisfied with a mixture of brown rice, millet, and greens. Today, some Japanese still eat rice three times a day, although they're now just as apt to have bread and coffee for breakfast.

ROBATAYAKI *Robatayaki* refers to restaurants in which seafood and vegetables are cooked over an open charcoal grill. In the olden days, an open fireplace (*robata*) in the middle of an old Japanese house was the center of activity for cooking, eating, socializing, and simply keeping warm. Therefore, today's *robatayaki* restaurants are like nostalgia trips back into Japan's past and are often decorated in rustic farmhouse style with the staff dressed in traditional clothing. *Robatayaki* restaurants—mostly open only in the evening—are popular among office workers for both eating and drinking.

There's no special menu in a *robatayaki* restaurant—rather, it includes just about everything eaten in Japan. The difference is that most of the food will be grilled. Favorites of

mine include ginkgo nuts (*ginnan*), asparagus wrapped in bacon (*asparagus bacon*), a type of green pepper (*piman*), mushrooms (various kinds), potatoes (*jagabataa*), and just about any kind of fish. You can usually get skewers of beef or chicken as well as a stew of meat and potatoes (*nikujaga*). Since ordering is usually a la carte, you'll just have to look and point.

SASHIMI & SUSHI It's estimated that the average Japanese eats 38 kilograms (84 lb.) of seafood a year—that's six times the average American consumption. Although this seafood may be served in any number of ways from grilled to boiled, a great deal of it is eaten raw.

Sashimi is simply raw seafood, usually served as an appetizer and eaten alone (that is, without rice). If you've never eaten it, a good choice to start out with is *maguro*, or lean tuna, which doesn't taste fishy at all and is so delicate in texture that it almost melts in your mouth. The way to eat sashimi is to first put *wasabi* (pungent green horseradish) into a small dish of soy sauce and then dip the raw fish in the sauce using your chopsticks.

Sushi, which is raw fish with vinegared rice, comes in many varieties. The best known is *nigiri-zushi*: raw fish, seafood, or vegetables placed on top of vinegared rice with just a touch of wasabi. It's also dipped in soy sauce. Use chopsticks or your fingers to eat sushi; remember you're supposed to eat each piece in one bite—quite a mouthful, but about the only way to keep it from falling apart. Another trick is to turn it upside down when you dip it in the sauce, to keep the rice from crumbling.

Also popular is *maki-zushi*, which consists of seafood, vegetables, or pickles rolled with rice inside a sheet of nori seaweed. *Inari-zushi* is vinegared rice and chopped vegetables inside a pouch of fried tofu bean curd.

Typical sushi includes tuna (*maguro*), flounder (*hirame*), sea bream (*tai*), squid (*ika*), octopus (*tako*), shrimp (*ebi*), sea eel (*anago*), and omelet (*tamago*). Ordering is easy because you usually sit at a counter where you can see all the food in a refrigerated glass case in front of you. You also get to see the sushi chefs at work. The typical meal begins with sashimi and is followed by sushi, but if you don't want to order separately, there are always various set meals or courses (*seto*).

By the way, the least expensive sushi is *chirashi*, which is a selection of fish, seafood, and usually tamago on a large shallow bowl of rice. Because you get more rice, those of you with bigger appetites may want to order chirashi. Another way to enjoy sushi without spending a fortune is at a *kaiten* sushi shop, in which plates of sushi circulate on a conveyor belt on the counter—customers reach for the dishes they want and pay for the number of dishes they take.

SHABU-SHABU & SUKIYAKI

Until about 100 years ago, the Japanese could think of nothing so disgusting as eating the flesh of animals (fish was okay). Considered unclean by the Buddhists, meat consumption was banned by the emperor way back in the 7th century. Imagine the horror of the Japanese to discover that Western “barbarians” ate bloody meat! It wasn't until Emperor Meiji himself announced more than a century ago his intention to eat meat that the Japanese accepted the idea. Today, the Japanese have become skilled in preparing a number of beef dishes, and according to a survey conducted more than a decade ago by the Japan Fisheries Association, grilled meat, curried rice, and hamburger were the three favorite dishes among high-school-senior boys living in Tokyo. (Girls, by the way, still preferred sushi.)

Sukiyaki is among Japan's best-known beef dishes and is one many Westerners seem to prefer. Actually, its origins are more Western than Japanese (it was introduced in the last century as a new Western cuisine). To the Western palate, however, it seems distinctly Japanese and today is immensely popular in Japan. Whenever I'm invited to a Japanese home, this is the meal most often served. Like fondue, it's cooked at the table.

Sukiyaki is thinly sliced beef cooked in a broth of soy sauce, stock, and sake along with scallions, spinach, mushrooms, tofu, bamboo shoots, and other vegetables. All diners serve themselves from the simmering pot and then dip their morsels into their own bowl of raw egg. You can skip the raw egg if you want (most Westerners do), but it adds to the taste and also cools the food down enough so that it doesn't burn.

Shabu-shabu is also prepared at your table and consists of thinly sliced beef cooked in a broth with vegetables in a kind of Japanese fondue. (It's named for the swishing sound the beef supposedly makes when cooking.) The main difference between the two dishes is the broth: Whereas in sukiyaki it consists of stock flavored with soy sauce and sake and is slightly sweet, in shabu-shabu it's relatively clear and has little taste of its own. The pots used are also different.

Using their chopsticks, shabu diners hold pieces of meat in the watery broth until they're cooked. This usually takes only a few seconds. Vegetables are left in longer to swim around until fished out. For dipping, there's either sesame sauce with diced green onions or a more bitter fish stock sauce. Restaurants serving sukiyaki usually serve shabu-shabu as well, and they're usually happy to show you the right way to prepare and eat it.

SHOJIN RYORI *Shojin Ryori* is the ultimate vegetarian meal, created

centuries ago to serve the needs of Zen Buddhist priests and pilgrims. Dishes may include *yudofu* (simmered tofu) and an array of local vegetables. Kyoto is the best place to experience this type of cuisine.

SOBA & UDON NOODLES The Japanese love eating noodles, but I suspect at least part of the fascination stems from the way they eat them—they slurp, sucking in the noodles with gravity-defying speed. What's more, slurping noodles is considered proper etiquette. Fearing it would stick with me forever, however, slurping is a technique I've never quite mastered.

There are many different kinds of noodles, and it seems like almost every region of Japan has its own special style or kind—some are eaten plain, some in combination with other foods such as shrimp tempura, some served hot, some served cold. **Soba**, made from unbleached buckwheat flour and enjoyed for its nutty flavor and high nutritional value, is eaten hot (*kake-soba*) or cold (*zaru-soba*). **Udon** is a thick white wheat noodle originally from Osaka; it's usually served hot. **Somen** is a fine white noodle eaten cold in the summer and dunked in a cold sauce. Establishments serving noodles range from stand-up eateries to more refined noodle restaurants with tatami seating. Regardless of where you eat them, noodles are among the least expensive dishes in Japan.

TEMPURA Today a well-known Japanese food, tempura was actually introduced by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Tempura is fish and vegetables coated in a batter of egg, water, and wheat flour and then deep-fried; it's served piping hot. To eat it, dip it in a sauce of soy, fish stock, radish (*daikon*), and grated ginger; in some restaurants, only some salt, powdered green tea, or a lemon wedge is provided as an accompaniment. Various

tempura specialties may include eggplant (*nasu*), mushroom (*shiitake*), sweet potato (*satsumaimo*), small green pepper (*shishito*), sliced lotus root (*renkon*), shrimp (*ebi*), squid (*ika*), lemon-mint leaf (*shiso*), and many kinds of fish. Again, the easiest thing to do is to order the set meal, the *teishoku*.

TEPPANYAKI A teppanyaki restaurant is a Japanese steak house. As in the famous Benihana restaurants in many U.S. cities, the chef slices, dices, and cooks your meal of tenderloin or sirloin steak and vegetables on a smooth hot grill right in front of you—though with much less fanfare than his U.S. counterpart. Because beef is relatively new in Japanese cooking, some people categorize teppanyaki restaurants as “Western.” However, I consider this style of cooking and presentation special enough to be referred to as Japanese. Teppanyaki restaurants also tend to be expensive, simply because of the price of beef in Japan, with Kobe beef the most prized.

TONKATSU Tonkatsu is the Japanese word for “pork cutlet,” made by dredging pork in wheat flour, moistening it with egg and water, dipping it in breadcrumbs, and deep-frying it in vegetable oil. Since restaurants serving tonkatsu are generally inexpensive, they're popular with office workers and families. The easiest order is the *teishoku*, which usually features either the pork filet (*hirekatsu*) or the pork loin (*rosukatsu*). In any case, your tonkatsu is served on a bed of shredded cabbage, and one or two different sauces will be at your table, a Worcestershire sauce and perhaps a specialty sauce. If you order the *teishoku*, it will come with rice, miso soup, and pickled vegetables.

UNAGI I'll bet that if you eat unagi without knowing what it is, you'll find it very tasty. In fact, you'll probably be

very surprised to find out you have just eaten eel. Popular as a health food because of its rich protein and high vitamin A content, eel is supposed to help you fight fatigue during hot summer months but is eaten year-round. Broiled eel (*kabayaki*) is prepared by grilling filet strips over a charcoal fire; the eel is repeatedly dipped in a sweetened barbecue soy sauce while cooking. A favorite way to eat broiled eel is on top of rice, in which case it's called *unaju* or *unagi donburi*. Do yourself a favor and try it.

YAKITORI Yakitori is chunks of chicken or chicken parts basted in a sweet soy sauce and grilled over a charcoal fire on thin skewers. Places that specialize in yakitori (yakitori-ya, often identifiable by a red paper lantern outside the front door) are technically not restaurants but drinking establishments; they usually don't open until 5 or 6pm. Most yakitori-ya are popular with workers as inexpensive places to drink, eat, and be merry.

The cheapest way to dine on yakitori is to order a set course, which will often include various parts of the chicken including the skin, heart, and liver. Since this may not be entirely to your taste, you may wish to order a la carte, which is more expensive but gets you exactly what you want. In addition to chicken, other skewered, charcoaled delicacies are usually offered (called *kushi-yaki*). If you're ordering by the stick, you might want to try chicken breast (*sasami*), chicken meatballs (*tsukune*), green peppers (*piman*), chicken and leeks (*negima*), mushrooms (*shiitake*), or ginkgo nuts (*ginman*).

OTHER CUISINES During your travels you might also run into these types of Japanese cuisine: **Kamameshi** is a rice casserole served in individual-size cast-iron pots with different toppings that might include seafood, meat, or vegetables. **Donburi** is also a rice dish, topped with tempura, eggs,

and meat like chicken or pork. **Nabe**, a stew cooked in an earthenware pot at your table, consists of chicken, sliced beef, pork, or seafood; noodles; and vegetables. **Oden** is a broth with fish cakes, tofu, eggs, and vegetables, served with hot mustard. If a restaurant advertises that it specializes in **Kyodo-Ryori**, it serves local specialties for which the region is famous and is often very rustic in decor. In recent years, restaurants serving **crossover fusion cuisine**—creative dishes inspired by ingredients from both sides of the Pacific—have mushroomed in Tokyo and a few major cities.

Although technically Chinese fast-food restaurants, **ramen shops** are a big part of dining in Japan. Serving what I consider to be generic Chinese noodles, soups, and other dishes, ramen shops can be found everywhere; they're easily recognizable by red signs, flashing lights, and quite often pictures of various dishes displayed right by the front door. Many are stand-up affairs—just a high counter to rest your bowl on. In addition to ramen (noodle and vegetable soup), you can also get such things as *yakisoba* (fried noodles) or—my favorite—*gyoza* (fried pork dumplings). What these places lack in atmosphere is made up for in price: Most dishes average about ¥600 (\$5), making them some of the cheapest places in Japan for a meal.

DRINKS

All Japanese restaurants serve complimentary **green tea** with meals. If that's a little too weak, you may want to try **sake**, an alcoholic beverage made from rice and served either hot or cold. It goes well with most forms of Japanese cuisine. Produced since about the 3rd century, sake varies by region, production method, alcoholic content, color, aroma, and taste. Altogether, there are more than 1,800 sake brewers in Japan producing about 10,000 varieties of sake. Miyabi is a prized classic sake;

other popular brands are Gekkeikan, Koshinokanbai, Hakutsuru (meaning White Crane), and Ozeki.

Japanese **beer** is also very popular. The biggest sellers are Kirin, Sapporo, Asahi, and Suntory, with each brand offering a bewildering variety of brews. They enjoyed exclusive rights to brew beer until deregulation in the 1990s opened the gates to competition; now microbreweries are found everywhere in Japan. Ironically enough, Budweiser is also a big hit among young Japanese. Businessmen are fond of **whiskey**, which they usually drink with ice and water. Popular in recent years is **shochu**, an alcoholic beverage usually made from rice but sometimes from wheat, sweet potatoes, or sugar cane. It used to be considered a drink of the lower classes, but sales have increased so much that it's threatening the sake and whiskey businesses. A clear liquid comparable, perhaps, to vodka, it can be consumed straight but is often combined with soda water in a drink called *chuhai*; watch out—the stuff can be deadly. **Wine**, usually available only at restaurants serving Western food, has gained in popularity in recent years, with both domestic and imported brands available. Although **cocktails** are available in discos, hotel lounges, and fancier bars at rather inflated prices, most Japanese stick with beer, sake, or whiskey.

TIPS ON DINING IN JAPAN RESTAURANT ESSENTIALS

ORDERING The biggest problem facing the hungry foreigner in Japan is ordering a meal, because few restaurants have English-language menus, especially outside major cities. This book alleviates the problem to a large extent by giving some sample dishes and prices for recommended restaurants throughout Japan; we've also noted throughout which restaurants offer English-language menus.

One aid to simplified ordering is the common use of plastic food models in

glass display cases either outside or just inside the front door of many restaurants. Sushi, tempura, daily specials, spaghetti—they're all there in mouthwatering plastic replicas along with the corresponding prices. Simply decide what you want and point it out to your waitress.

Unfortunately, not all restaurants in Japan have plastic display cases, especially the more exclusive or traditional ones. In fact, you'd be missing a lot of Japan's best cuisine if you restrict yourself to eating only at places with displays. If there's no display from which to choose, the best thing to do is to look at what people around you are eating and order what looks best. An alternative is to order the *teishoku*, or daily special meal (also called "set course" or simply "course," especially in restaurants serving Western food); these fixed-price meals consist of a main dish and several side dishes, including soup, rice, and Japanese pickles. Although most restaurants have special set courses for dinner as well, lunch is the usual time for the *teishoku*.

HOURS In the larger cities, the usual hours for restaurants are from about 11am to 10 or 11pm. Of course, some establishments close earlier at 9pm, while others stay open past midnight; the majority close for a few hours in the afternoon (2–5pm). The main thing to remember is that if you're in a big city like Tokyo or Osaka, you'll want to avoid the lunchtime rush, which is from noon to 1pm. In rural areas and small towns, restaurants tend to close early, often by 7:30 or 8pm.

Another thing to keep in mind is that the closing time posted for most restaurants is exactly that—everyone is expected to pay his or her bill and leave. A general rule of thumb is that the last order is taken at least a half-hour before closing time, sometimes an hour or more for *kaiseki*

restaurants. To be on the safe side, therefore, try to arrive at least an hour before closing time so you have time to relax and enjoy your meal.

ETIQUETTE

UPON ARRIVAL As soon as you're seated in a Japanese restaurant (that is, a restaurant serving Japanese food), you'll be given a wet towel, which will be steaming hot in winter or pleasantly cool in summer. Called an *oshibori*, it's for wiping your hands. In all but the fancy restaurants, men can get away with wiping their faces as well, but women are not supposed to (I ignore this if it's hot and humid outside). Sadly, some cheaper Japanese restaurants now resort to a paper towel wrapped in plastic, which isn't nearly the same. Oshibori are generally not served in Western restaurants.

CHOPSTICKS The next thing you'll probably be confronted with is chopsticks.

How to Use Chopsticks The proper way to use a pair is to place the first chopstick between the base of the thumb and the top of the ring finger (this chopstick remains stationary) and the second one between the top of the thumb and the middle and index fingers (this second chopstick is the one you move to pick up food).

The best way to learn to use chopsticks is to have a Japanese person show you how. It's not difficult, but if you find it impossible, some restaurants might have a fork as well. How proficiently foreigners handle chopsticks is a matter of great curiosity for the Japanese, and they're surprised if you know how to use them; even if you were to live in Japan for 20 years, you would never stop receiving compliments on how talented you are with chopsticks.

Chopstick Etiquette If you're taking something from a communal bowl or tray, you're supposed to turn your chopsticks upside down and use the

part that hasn't been in your mouth; after transferring the food to your plate, you turn the chopsticks back to their proper position. The exception is shabu-shabu and sukiyaki.

Never stick your chopsticks down vertically into your bowl of rice and leave them there—that is done only when a person has died. Also, don't pass anything from your chopsticks to another person's chopsticks; that's done only to pass the bones of the cremated.

EATING SOUP & NOODLES If you're eating soup, you won't use a spoon. Rather, you'll pick up the bowl and drink from it. Use your chopsticks to fish out larger pieces of food. It's considered in good taste to slurp with gusto, especially if you're eating noodles. Noodle shops in Japan are always well orchestrated with slurps and smacks.

DRINKING If you're drinking in Japan, the main thing to remember is that you never pour your own glass. Bottles of beer are so large that people often share one. The rule is that, in turn, one person pours for everyone else in the group, so be sure to hold up your glass when someone is pouring for you. Only as the night progresses do the Japanese get sloppy about this rule. It took me a while to figure this out, but if no one notices your empty glass, the best thing to do is to pour everyone else a drink so that someone will pour yours. If someone wants to pour you a drink and your glass is full, the proper thing to do is to take a few gulps so that he or she can fill your glass. Because each person is continually filling everyone else's glass, you never know exactly how much you've had to drink, which (depending on how you look at it) is very good or very bad.

PAYING THE BILL If you go out with a group of friends (not as a visiting guest of honor and not with business associates), it's customary to

split the dinner bill equally, even if you all ordered different things. Even foreigners living in Japan adopt the practice of splitting the bill; it certainly makes figuring everyone's share easier, especially since **there's no tipping in Japan**. But it can be hard on frugal diners on a budget.

OTHER TIPS It's considered bad manners to walk down the street eating or drinking (except at a festival). You'll notice that if a Japanese buys a drink from a vending machine, he'll stand there, gulp it down, and throw away the container before going on. In recent years, an increasing number of young people are ignoring this unwritten rule, much to the chagrin of their elders.

HOW TO EAT WITHOUT SPENDING A FORTUNE

During your first few days in Japan—particularly if you're in Tokyo—money will seem to flow from your pockets like water. In fact, money has a tendency to disappear so quickly that many people become convinced they must have lost some of it somehow. At this point, almost everyone panics (I've seen it happen again and again), but then they slowly realize that, since prices are markedly different here (steeper), a bit of readjustment in thinking and habits is necessary. Coffee, for example, is something of a luxury, and some Japanese are astonished at the thought of drinking four or five cups a day. Here are some tips for getting the most for your money.

BREAKFAST If you're on a tight budget, **avoid eating breakfast at your hotel**. Coffee shops offer what's called "morning service" until 10 or 11am; it generally consists of a cup of coffee, a small salad, a boiled egg, and the thickest slice of toast you've ever seen for about ¥600 (\$5). That's a real bargain when you consider that just one cup of coffee can cost ¥250 to ¥500 (\$2.10–\$4.15). (Except at some

hotel breakfast buffets, there's no such thing as the bottomless cup in Japan.) There are many coffee-shop chains in Japan, including Doutor, Pronto, and an ever-expanding Starbucks (400 in Japan at last count).

SET LUNCHESES **Eat your biggest meal at lunch.** Many restaurants serving Japanese food offer a daily set lunch, or *teishoku*, at a fraction of what their set dinners might be. Usually ranging in price from ¥700 to ¥1,500 (\$5.85–\$13), they're generally available from 11 or 11:30am to 1:30 or 2pm. A Japanese *teishoku* will often include the main course (such as *tempura*, grilled fish, or the specialty of the house), soup, pickled vegetables, rice, and tea, while the set menu in a Western-style restaurant (often called set lunch) usually consists of a main dish, salad, bread, and coffee.

CHEAP EATS Inexpensive restaurants can be found in department stores (often one whole floor will be devoted to various kinds of restaurants, most with plastic-food displays), underground shopping arcades, nightlife districts, and in and around train and subway stations. Some of the cheapest establishments for a night out on the town are the countless **yakitori-ya**, **noodle shops**, and **ramen shops**. For sushi, the cheapest places are those that deliver food via a conveyor belt; you simply reach out and take the plates that look good. **Coffee shops** often offer inexpensive Western food, including sandwiches. Japan also has American **fast-food chains**, such as McDonald's (where Big Macs cost about ¥250/\$2.10, though tofu sandwiches and teriyaki burgers are also on offer), Wendy's, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, as well as Japanese chains—Freshness Burger, Lotteria, Moos Burger, and First Kitchen, among them—that sell hamburgers and french fries.

Ethnic restaurants, particularly those serving Indian, Korean, Chinese,

Italian, and other cuisines, are plentiful and usually inexpensive. **Hotel restaurants** can also be good bargains for inexpensive set lunches or buffets (called *viking* in Japanese), while inexpensive drinking places are good bets for dinner.

Streetside stalls, called *yatai*, are also good sources of inexpensive meals. These restaurants-on-wheels sell a variety of foods, including *oden* (fish cakes), *yakitori* (skewered barbecued chicken), and *yakisoba* (fried noodles), as well as sake and beer. They appear mostly at night, lighted by a single lantern or a string of lights, and most have a counter with stools as well, protected in winter by a wall of tarp. These can be great, cozy places for rubbing elbows with the locals. Fukuoka, in Kyushu, is famous for its *yatai*, but you'll find them in many cities, especially in nightlife districts. Sadly, however, traditional pushcarts are being replaced by motorized vans, which do not offer seating.

PREPARED FOODS You can save even more money by avoiding restaurants altogether. There are all kinds of prepared foods you can buy; some are even complete meals, perfect for picnics in a park or right in your hotel room.

Perhaps the best known is the **obento**, or box lunch, commonly sold on express trains, on train-station

platforms, in food sections of department stores, and at counter windows of tiny shops throughout Japan. In fact, the obento served by vendors on trains and at train stations are an inexpensive way to sample regional cuisine since they often include food typical of the region. Costing usually between ¥800 and ¥1,500 (\$6.65–\$13), the basic obento contains a piece of meat (generally fish or chicken), various side dishes, rice, and pickled vegetables. Sushi boxed lunches are also readily available.

My favorite place to shop for prepared foods is **department stores**. Located in basements, these food and produce sections hark back to Japanese markets of yore, with vendors yelling out their wares and crowds of housewives deciding on the evening's dinner. Different counters specialize in different items—tempura, yakitori, eel, Japanese pickles, cooked fish, sushi (sometimes made by robots!), salads, vegetables, and desserts. Almost the entire spectrum of Japanese cuisine is available, as are numerous samples. There are also counters selling obento box meals. In any case, you can eat for less than ¥1,200 (\$10), and there's nothing like milling with Japanese housewives to make you feel like one of the locals. Though not as colorful, **24-hour convenience stores** also sell packaged foods, including sandwiches and obento.

14 Packing Tips

The first thing you'll want to do when you're packing is select the smallest bag you can get away with and **pack as lightly as you can**. Storage space is limited on Japan's trains, including the Shinkansen bullet train, business hotels sometimes lack closets, and there are multitudes of stairs and overhead and underground passageways to navigate in virtually every train station in the country.

The most important item is a **good pair of walking shoes**, well-broken-in.

You will probably be walking much more than you do at home and because shoe sizes in Japan are smaller than in the West, you can't count on finding a pair that will fit. Keep in mind, too, that because you have to remove your shoes to enter Japanese homes, inns, shrines, and temples, you should bring a pair that's easy to slip on and off. And since you may be walking around in stocking feet, save yourself embarrassment by packing socks and hose without holes.

 Tips Help with Heavy Bags

If your bag becomes a burden but you don't want to mail items home, an alternative is to send a bag onward to your next or last stop by *takkyubin*, available at larger hotels or from most stations. Bags reach most destinations in 1 or 2 nights, with the delivery cost of an average-size bag less than \$20. I love this amazingly efficient service—it's a life saver!

As for **clothes**, you'll need a coat in winter and very light clothing for the hot and humid summer months. Jackets are necessary for spring and autumn; I've seen it snow in March in Tokyo, and even May can be quite crisp. Japan's top French restaurants usually require jackets and ties. Although the older generation considers it inappropriate for women to wear dresses without hose or tops without sleeves, I've noticed that the younger generation ignores this, especially in resort areas. Jeans and capris are okay for casual dining and sightseeing, but shorts are uncommon in Japan outside hiking and sports areas.

Virtually all hotels and Japanese-style inns—save youth hostels and some budget-priced inns—provide towels, soap, washcloths, toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, a cotton kimono (called a *yukata* and not a giveaway), and usually razors. If you run out of something, you'll have no

problem finding it in Japan. Most hotels and inns also provide a thermos of hot water or a water heater as well as some tea bags. If you're a coffee addict, you can save money by buying instant coffee and drinking your morning cup in your hotel room. Hair dryers are a standard feature in almost all rooms with private bathrooms, including business hotels.

It's also good to carry a supply of **pocket tissues**, which you can pick up at newspaper stands near and in train stations, because some public restrooms do not have toilet paper. It's also a good idea to carry change for local buses (faster than trying to change ¥1,000 notes), a folding umbrella, and a compass for getting your bearings and following directions using local maps. Finally, pack small, inexpensive gifts from home that can be given to those who show unexpected kindness, including candy, postcards, and hometown souvenirs.

15 Suggested Itineraries for Seeing Japan

Japan, with its rich culture and varied geography, has much to offer the curious visitor, not only in and around the major cities but in many of the outlying regions as well. If you want to see *everything*, you should plan on spending at least a year in Japan. More likely, your time will be limited to a week or two, so you'll have to be selective; this section will help you decide on an itinerary.

The suggested itineraries are divided into two sections. The first one is useful for first-time visitors who have only

1 or 2 weeks in Japan and want to see the highlights of central and southern Honshu. The second section consists of regional itineraries, giving you an idea of how to plan your travels if you're interested in touring, for example, the Japan Alps or Hokkaido. If you're in Japan for several weeks, you can fashion a personalized itinerary by combining several of these suggested itineraries. You might, for example, wish to combine the 1-week tour with a trip to Kyushu.

Regardless of what itinerary you plan, I am adamant about one thing: **Kyoto is a must.** In addition to having served as the nation's capital for more than 1,000 years, it has more temples, shrines, and historic sights than any other Japanese city. As a base, it's also useful for touring other attractions in the Kansai area. Other **top favorites include Nara**, another ancient capital near Kyoto; **Tokyo**, for its wealth of museums, design, and fashion; **Mount Koya**, Japan's most revered religious center where you can sleep in a Buddhist temple; **Nikko**, the site of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu's mausoleum; **Takayama and Shirakawago**, two picturesque villages in the Japan Alps; **Hiroshima**, with its famous Peace Memorial Park and a museum of the atomic bomb; **Kurashiki**, with its picture-perfect historic warehouse district; and Japan's numerous hot-spring spas.

FOR FIRST-TIMERS

If You Have 1 Week in Japan

Day 1 After your arrival at Narita Airport, head to your hotel in Tokyo (about a 2-hr. trip). Recuperate from your flight, settle in, and get a feel for the city. Top off the day with a meal in a traditional restaurant. Try to stay up as late as you can to adjust to the new time zone.

Day 2 Because of the difference in time zones, you'll probably be wide awake in the wee hours of the morning, so get up and head for Tsukiji Fish Market. After a breakfast of fresh sushi, take the Hibiya Line to Ueno, where you'll find the Tokyo National Museum, the world's finest repository of Japanese art and crafts. From Ueno, hop on the Ginza Line for Asakusa and its famous Nakamise Dori Lane with shops selling traditional products and Sensoji Temple. If you have time, stroll down Ginza's fashionable

shopping district or head toward Harajuku with its inexpensive clothing boutiques and Oriental Bazaar. Spend the evening in Shinjuku, Roppongi, or another of Tokyo's famous nightlife areas; or attend a Kabuki play.

Day 3 Take the 40-minute Shinkansen bullet train to Odawara or the 1½-hour Odakyu Romance Car to Hakone Yumoto, gateways to the wonderful Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park (if possible, leave your luggage at Odawara Station and travel overnight only with a small bag). Here you can travel through some of Japan's most scenic countryside via a circuitous route that includes a two-car tram, a cable car, ropeway, and a boat, while seeing such sights as a wonderful open-air sculptural museum and, if you're lucky, the elusive Mount Fuji. Spend the night in the Fujiya Hotel, one of my favorites in all of Japan, or in a Japanese inn.

Day 4 Complete your trip through Hakone, return to Odawara, and transfer to the 3-hour Shinkansen bullet train to Kyoto. End the day with a stroll through Kyoto's central shopping area and a visit to the Museum of Kyoto, topped with a walk through the Gion geisha district and the Pontocho nightlife area. Spend the night in one of Kyoto's many traditional Japanese-style inns.

Day 5 Start the day with a self-guided walk through eastern Kyoto, seeing Sanjusangendo Hall, Kiyomizu Temple, and perhaps Heian Shrine with its garden, followed by shopping at the Kyoto Handicraft Center. If it's summer, spend the evening watching cormorant fishing in nearby Arashiyama.

Day 6 Visit Kyoto's other main attractions—Nijo Castle, Kyoto Imperial Palace, Ryoanji Temple

with its famous rock garden, and the Golden Pavilion. If you have a rail pass, you should also consider taking the 1-hour Shinkansen bullet train from Kyoto to Himeji, where you can tour what's arguably Japan's most beautiful feudal castle.

Day 7 Depart Japan from Kansai International Airport.

If You Have 2 Weeks in Japan

This is something of a whirlwind trip, but it allows you to take in some of the best that Honshu island has to offer. If you have 1 or 2 extra days, you might wish to devote more time to Kyoto or one of the other destinations. Also, if you're landing at Kansai International Airport outside Osaka instead of at Narita Airport near Tokyo, you'll want to modify the itineraries; if you have no desire to see Tokyo, see the Kansai area itinerary below.

Day 1 As above.

Day 2 Rise in the wee hours and head to Tsukiji Fish Market, following your visit with a walk through the nearby lovely Hama Rikyu Garden. From the garden, board a boat for a cruise down the Sumida River to the historic district of Asakusa, where you can shop for souvenirs on Nakamise Dori and visit Sensoji Temple. In the late afternoon, head to the Ginza for a visit to one of Japan's legendary department stores, followed perhaps by a performance of Kabuki at the nearby Kabukiza theater.

Day 3 Visit Tokyo's two most important museums—the Tokyo National Museum with its decorative arts; and the Edo-Tokyo Museum, which outlines the capital's history. Next, go to Hara-juku to see Meiji Shrine, Tokyo's most popular shrine, and to do some shopping at Oriental Bazaar, great for Japanese souvenirs. Take in some of Tokyo's crazy nightlife after dark.

Day 4 Take a day trip outside of Tokyo. Good choices include the ancient capital Kamakura or Nikko, which is famous for the sumptuous mausoleum of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu. Or take an overnight trip to Hakone (see Day 3 in the 1-week itinerary above).

Day 5 Early in the morning, take the Shinkansen to Nagoya (about 2 hr.) and then a 3-hour train ride to Takayama in the Japan Alps (if you don't have a rail pass, there's also a direct bus from Tokyo's Shinjuku Station). Explore the picturesque, narrow streets of this old castle town and its many interesting museums.

Day 6 Spend the next day visiting the many specialized museums in Takayama or, if you wish, take a side trip to Shirakawago, a tiny village of rice paddies and thatched farmhouses.

Day 7 From Takayama, take the train to Kyoto (there's one direct train daily; or transfer in Nagoya). Spend the afternoon in central Kyoto's shopping district, visit the Museum of Kyoto, and end the day with a stroll through the Gion geisha district and Pontocho.

Day 8 Start the day with a self-guided walk through eastern Kyoto, viewing Sanjusangendo Hall, Kiyomizu Temple, and perhaps Heian Shrine, followed by shopping at the Kyoto Handicraft Center.

Day 9 Visit Nijo Castle, Ryoanji Temple, and the Golden Pavilion. If it's summer, spend the evening watching cormorant fishing in nearby Arashiyama.

Day 10 Early in the morning, head for Nara, one of Japan's ancient capitals, where you'll want to spend at least 3 hours seeing the Great Buddha and Kasuga Shrine in expansive Nara Park. From Nara, you can take the Kintetsu Railways

private line (departing from Nara Kintetsu Station) to Kintetsu Namba Station in Osaka, transferring there to the Nankai Koya Line bound for Mount Koya. (If you have a rail pass, you can take Japan Railways trains to Hashimoto and transfer there to the private Nankai Koya Line.) Mount Koya is Japan's most sacred religious site, achingly beautiful with more than 120 Buddhist temples spread through the forests. Spend the night in one of these temples, dining on vegetarian food.

Day 11 After visiting Okunoin, the burial grounds of Kobo Daishi, return to Osaka and transfer to the Shinkansen bullet train at Shin-Osaka Station or to a JR train at Osaka Station bound for Kurashiki. En route, make a 2-hour stopover in Himeji to see the beautiful Himeji Castle. Spend the night in Kurashiki and take an evening stroll along the canal.

Day 12 Take in the sights of Kurashiki, including its many museums. Leave for Hiroshima late in the day (it's about an hour away by Shinkansen).

Day 13 Spend the morning at Peace Memorial Park with its museum and statues, and follow it with an afternoon excursion to the tiny island of Miyajima with its famous Itsukushima Shrine.

Day 14 Depart Japan.

REGIONAL TOURS

The Kansai Area in 7 Days

Day 1 Arrive in Osaka by train or by plane and transfer to Osaka Station (a 30-min. trip from the airport). Settle into your hotel and then head for Spa World, one of Japan's most sophisticated hot-spring spas, where you can swim and relax in whirlpools and hot baths; maybe you'll opt for a massage to smooth out those travel kinks.

Day 2 Spend the day in Osaka, visiting Osaka Castle, the aquarium, and maybe even Universal Studios. In the evening, explore the Dotonburi nightlife area or take in a Bunraku puppet performance.

Day 3 From Kintetsu Namba Station, take the Nankai Koya Line to Mount Koya, Japan's most sacred temple village, to spend the night in a Buddhist temple and dine on vegetarian food.

Day 4 Return to Shin-Osaka Station and transfer to a train to Himeji (a 40-min. trip by Shinkansen), where you can tour the magnificent Himeji Castle and delightful Kokoen Garden. In late afternoon, take the Shinkansen to Kyoto, where you should stay in one of Kyoto's many traditional Japanese-style inns.

Day 5 In Kyoto, visit Ryoanji Temple with its rock garden, the Golden Pavilion, the Kyoto Imperial Palace, and Nijo Castle. Top off the day with a walk through Kyoto's central shopping area, stopping off to see the Museum of Kyoto. In the evening, take a walk in Gion and along Pontocho.

Day 6 Start the day with a self-guided walk through eastern Kyoto, seeing Sanjusangendo Hall, Kiyomizu Temple, and Heian Shrine, followed by shopping at the Kyoto Handicraft Center. If it's summer, spend the evening watching cormorant fishing in nearby Arashiyama.

Day 7 Take a day trip to Nara, where you can see the Great Buddha and Kasuga Shrine in Nara Park.

The Kanto Area in 7 Days

Days 1–3 See "If You Have 2 Weeks in Japan," above.

Day 4 Take a day trip to Kamakura, the ancient capital with many temples.

Day 5 Visit Nikko for the day, famous for the sumptuous mausoleum of Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu.

Day 6 Take the 40-minute Shinkansen bullet train to Odawara or the 1½-hour Odakyu Romance Car to Hakone Yumoto, gateways to the wonderful Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park (if possible, travel only with an overnight bag, leaving your luggage at your Tokyo hotel). You'll travel through some of Japan's most scenic countryside via a circuitous route that includes a two-car tram, a cable car, ropeway, and a boat while seeing such sights as a wonderful open-air sculptural museum and, if you're lucky, elusive Mount Fuji. Spend the night in the Fujiya Hotel, one of my favorites in all of Japan, or a Japanese inn.

Day 7 Complete your trip through Hakone and return to Tokyo.

The Japan Alps & Chubu (Central Honshu) District in 7 Days

Day 1 Settle into Nagoya, gateway to the region's many destinations. Take in Nagoya Castle and the Tokugawa Art Museum with its outstanding collection of Tokugawa memorabilia.

Day 2 Spend the morning seeing a few more Nagoya attractions such as the Port of Nagoya Public Aquarium or Noritake Square. In the afternoon, head to Inuyama City and its Meiji Mura open-air architectural museum, one of my favorite museums in all of Japan. If it's summer, stay in Inuyama to observe the evening cormorant fishing.

Day 3 Depart Nagoya by train on the Chuo Honsen Line to either Nagiso or Nakatsugawa Station (about an hour's ride) and then board a bus for either Tsumago or Magome. Here you can have a pleasant 3-hour hike along the old Nakasendo Highway, one of feudal Japan's several highways connecting

Edo with the provinces, and tour the old post towns of Tsumago and Magome. You can spend the night here, or continue onward to Matsumoto in the Japan Alps.

Day 4 Spend the morning seeing Matsumoto's two most important sights—Matsumoto Castle, with Japan's oldest existing donjon, and the Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, one of the best woodblock-print museums in Japan. In the afternoon, take the train north to Kanazawa on the Sea of Japan.

Day 5 Spend the day in Kanazawa. Be sure to stroll through Kenrokuen Garden, considered one of Japan's finest, and tour the nearby Seisonkaku Villa and the excellent Ishikawa Prefectural Museum for Traditional Products.

Day 6 Take the bus onward to Shirakawago (there are two buses daily mid-Mar to Nov), a tiny village of rice paddies and thatched farmhouses. Spend the night in one of these farmhouses.

Day 7 Take the bus to Takayama, a gem of a village in the Japan Alps. Spend the afternoon strolling through its picturesque historic district and visiting a few of its many unique museums. Spend the night in a traditional Japanese-style inn. Before departing Takayama, visit the colorful morning market by the river.

The Chugoku (Western Honshu) District in 4 Days

Day 1 Four hours west of Tokyo or an hour west of Osaka, Okayama is a major stop on the Tokaido-Sanyo Shinkansen Line. En route, stop off in Himeji for a tour of Japan's loveliest castle. Spend the night in Okayama.

Day 2 Take in Okayama's sights, especially Okayama Castle, deliberately painted black to contrast with white Himeji Castle, and the nearby Korakuen Garden, considered one

of Japan's most beautiful landscaped gardens. Depart Okayama for a night in one of Okayama Prefecture's six International Villas, beautifully constructed and situated in rural communities.

Day 3 Take the train to Kurashiki, 26km (16 miles) west of Okayama and one of Japan's most photogenic towns. Stroll along the willow-lined canal of its famous historic district, stopping in at the Ohara Museum of Art, the Kurashiki Folkcraft Museum, and the Japanese Rural Toy Museum. Spend the night here.

Day 4 Take the Shinkansen 1 hour farther west to Hiroshima and spend a couple of sobering hours at Peace Memorial Park. Afterward, take a 45-minute train to Miyajima, a scenic island in the Seto Inland Sea with the famous Itsukushima Shrine.

Shikoku Island in 4 Days

You can easily combine this tour with the Chugoku tour above.

Day 1 From Okayama, take a train over the long Seto Ohashi Bridge for the 1-hour ride to Takamatsu, where you'll spend the night. Visit Ritsurin Park, a beautiful garden in which to stroll, and then head to Shikoku Mura Village, an open-air Edo-Period museum.

Day 2 Take the train 1 hour west to Kotohira, where you can visit Kotohiragu Shrine and the nearby Kompira Grand Playhouse, one of Japan's oldest Kabuki theaters. Head onward to Matsuyama, where you should spend a couple relaxing hours at the delightful Dogo Onsen Honkan bathhouse before retiring to your hotel.

Day 3 Tour Matsuyama Castle, one of Japan's few original castles, and then take a 20-minute train to the picturesque village of Uchiko, which boasts some fine old homes and buildings dating from the Edo Period.

Day 4 For an up-close and personal tour of the Seto Inland Sea, head to the nearby Shimanami Kaido route with its dedicated hiking and biking trail (rental bikes available) connecting six islands and extending 69km (43 miles) all the way to Hiroshima Prefecture. Stop off at the Shiyoden Treasure Museum with its astounding collection of samurai armor and swords.

Kyushu Island in 9 Days

Day 1 Take the bullet train to Hakata Station in Fukuoka (a 6-hr. trip from Tokyo). If you feel up to it, tour one or two of the town's attractions. My favorites are the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum and Daizafu Tenmangu Shrine.

Day 2 Take the train 2½ hours south to Beppu, one of Japan's most famous hot-spring resorts. Tour the Hells, boiling ponds that boast unique features—one spouts one of the largest geysers in Japan; another is used as breeding grounds for crocodiles. Afterwards, soothe your travel-weary muscles at Suginoi Palace, one of Japan's largest and most interesting hot-spring public baths, or by being buried up to your neck in hot sand at the Takekawara Bathhouse. Spend the night in Beppu.

Day 3 Take the train 3 hours farther south to Miyazaki. Be sure to visit Haniwa Garden with its striking replica burial mounds and 400 *haniwa* clay figures. Top off the day at Ocean Dome, Japan's largest all-weather indoor water park.

Day 4 It's about a 2-hour train ride farther south to Kagoshima, where you can wander through the lava fields of Mount Sakurajima and visit lovely Senganen with its Feudal-Era garden, villa, and museum. Spend the night in Kagoshima.

Day 5 Take the bus 31km (19 miles) south to Chiran, a castle

town dating from the Edo Period. Continue southward to Ibusuki, Kyushu's southernmost tip, where you can have yourself buried up to your neck in hot black sand at Surigahama Public Beach. Spend the night in Ibusuki.

Days 6–7 Take the train 3½ hours northward along Kyushu's western coast to Kumamoto and check into your hotel. Or take the bus to Hitoyoshi on the Kumagawa River for some white-water rafting. Tour the massive Kumamoto Castle and then go shopping at the Kumamoto Traditional Crafts Center next door. Visit Suizenji Garden, which replicates the 53 stages of the Tokaido Highway in its landscaping.

Day 8 Board the train for the cosmopolitan Nagasaki, where you should spend the day seeing the sights, including Glover Garden and the Peace Park, dedicated to those who died in the atomic blast.

Day 9 Take a 2-hour bus ride to Unzen Spa, where you can walk through the Hells, hike to the top of Mount Fugen, and enjoy the indoor and outdoor baths of Unzen Spa House.

The Tohoku District in 4 Days

Day 1 Take the Shinkansen from Tokyo to Sendai (about 2 hr.) and then board a sightseeing boat for a 50-minute trip to Matsushima, famous for its scenic coastline of pine-studded islets. Visit the venerable Zuiganji Temple, northern Japan's most famous Zen temple, Entsuin Temple with its nice gardens, and a museum or two. Spend the night in Matsushima.

Day 2 Return to Sendai and take the Shinkansen onward to Kakunodate, a small and relatively unspoiled castle town famous for its samurai district and cherry trees. Be sure to see the Aoyagi Samurai Manor, a compound of traditional buildings

packed with Edo-Period memorabilia. Spend the night in Kakunodate.

Days 3–4 Backtrack one stop on the Shinkansen to Tazawako and board a bus for Nyuto Onsen, a secluded valley of hot springs and rustic inns. It's a good base from which to explore the many wonders of the Towada-Hachimantai National Park, including hiking, skiing, and swimming.

Hokkaido Island in 7 Days

Day 1 Take the train to Hakodate (about a 6-hr. trip from Tokyo). Take a cable car to the top of Mount Hakodate, famous for its night view of Hakodate.

Day 2 Visit Hakodate's morning market and then depart for Noboribetsu Onsen. Hike through Hell Valley for a view of the bubbling hot water that has made Noboribetsu famous, and then experience its magic at the Daiichi Takimotokan hot-spring baths (open to non-hotel guests until 3pm). Spend the night in Noboribetsu Onsen.

Day 3 Visit Edo Wonderland Noboribetsu, an early Edo-Period theme park, or the Noboribetsu Marine Park. In late afternoon, depart for Sapporo, about 1½ hours away, where you'll spend the night.

Day 4 Take a walk through Sapporo's downtown district and then tour the Sapporo Beer Museum, following the tour with lunch at the Sapporo Factory. Afterward, take a bus 50 minutes to Nopporo Forest Park, where you can visit the Historical Museum of Hokkaido and see vintage homes and buildings at the Historical Village of Hokkaido. Spend the night in Sapporo.

Day 5 Depart Sapporo by train to Kamikawa (a 2½-hr. ride), followed by a 30-minute bus ride to Souunkyo in Daisetsuzan National Park. Rent

a bike and ride to the pretty Sounkyo Gorge, and then take the cable car to the top of Kuro-dake Mountain for the view or some hiking. Spend the night in Sounkyo.

Day 6 Depart Sounkyo early in the morning by bus back to Kamikawa and then take the train 2½ hours to Bihoro. There, board a sightseeing

bus for a 5-hour tour of Akan National Park, ending up in Akanko, where you'll spend the night.

Day 7 Take a boat cruise of Lake Akan, famous for its *marimo*, a spongelike ball of duckweed, and tour the marimo museum. Visit Ainu Kotan Village with its shops and traditional Ainu dancing.

16 Recommended Books

HISTORY The definitive work of Japan's history through the ages is *Japan: The Story of a Nation* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991) by Edwin O. Reischauer, a former U.S. ambassador to Japan. Ivan Morris's *The World of the Shining Prince: Court Life in Ancient Japan* (Kodansha, 1994) highlights the golden age of the imperial court through diaries and literature of the Heian Period (794–1192), while *Everyday Life in Traditional Japan* (Tuttle, 2000) details the daily lives of samurai, farmers, craftsmen, merchants, courtiers, and outcasts during the Edo Period. More recent history is the subject of Pulitzer Prize winners *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* by John W. Dower (W.W. Norton & Co., 1999), which paints a vivid picture of America's role in reshaping Japan and what life was like for the Japanese under American occupation; and *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* by Herbert P. Bix (HarperCollins, 2000), which contends that the wartime emperor was not a passive leader controlled by the military but rather was actively involved in national policy and bore deep responsibility for the war.

For personal accounts of Japan in ages past, there's no better anthology than Donald Keene's *Travelers of a Hundred Ages: The Japanese as Revealed Through 1,000 Years of Diaries* (Holt, 1989). Written by Japanese from all walks of life, the journals provide fascinating insight into the hidden worlds of imperial

courts, Buddhist monasteries, isolated country inns, and more. Lafcadio Hearn, a prolific writer about things Japanese, describes life in Japan around the turn of the 20th century in *Writings from Japan* (Penguin, 1985), while Isabella Bird, an Englishwoman who traveled alone in Japan in the 1870s, writes a vivid account of rural Japanese life in *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Virago Press Limited, 1984).

SOCIETY Reischauer's *The Japanese Today* (Tuttle, 1993) offers a unique perspective of Japanese society, including the historical events that have shaped and influenced Japanese behavior and the role of the individual in Japanese society. A classic description of the Japanese and their culture is found in Ruth Benedict's brilliant *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989), first published in the 1940s but reprinted many times since. For a more contemporary approach, look into *The Japanese Mind: The Goliath Explained* (Linden Press/Simon & Schuster, 1983) by Robert C. Christopher, valuable for its insight into the Japanese and the role history has played in developing their psyche. Debunking theories that have long shaped the outside world's views of Japan (many of which are espoused by the books above) is *Japan: A Reinterpretation* (Pantheon, 1997) by former *International Herald Tribune* Tokyo bureau chief Patrick Smith, who gives a spirited reinterpretation of

Japan's economic miracle and recent demise.

For advice on Japanese etiquette, refer to *Etiquette Today: A Guide to Business and Social Customs* (Tuttle, 1994) by James M. Vardaman and Michiko Sasaki Vardaman; it covers everything from bowing and bathing to eating and dining customs, office etiquette, and the complicated art of giving gifts. Business travelers may also want to read *Business Japan: A Practical Guide to Understanding Japanese Business Culture* by Peggy Kenna and Sonra Lacy (NTC Publishing, 1994), which compares American and Japanese business styles, practices, and social customs.

CULTURE & THE ARTS For a general rundown on the historic development of literature, religion, and art through the ages, see George B. Sansom's *Japan: A Short Cultural History* (Charles E. Tuttle, 1997), or Paul Varley's in-depth *Japanese Culture* (University of Hawaii Press, 1984).

The Japan Travel Bureau puts out some nifty pocket-size illustrated booklets on things Japanese (you can buy them at any bookstore with an English section, such as those recommended in the Tokyo chapter), including *Eating in Japan*, *Living Japanese Style*, *Festivals of Japan*, *Martial Arts & Sports in Japan*, and *Japanese Family & Culture*, which covers everything from marriage in Japan to problems with mothers-in-law and explanations of why Dad gets home so late. My favorite, however, is *Salaryman in Japan* (JTB, 1986), which describes the private and working lives of Japan's army of white-collar workers who receive set salaries. For a cultural overview in one book, see *Introduction to Japanese Culture*, edited by Daniel Sosnoski (Tuttle, 1996), which covers major festivals, the tea ceremony, flower arranging, Kabuki, sumo, Japanese board games, geisha, Buddhism, kanji, and much more.

The history and philosophy of the tea ceremony, beginning with its origins in the 12th century, are given in *The Tea Ceremony* (Kodansha, 1998) by Sen'ō Tanaka. Another worthwhile read is *The Japanese Way of Tea: From its Origins in China to Sen Rikyu* by Sen Soshitsu (University of Hawaii Press, 1998), which may well be the definitive book on tea.

A Net of Fireflies: Japanese Haiku and Haiku Paintings (Tuttle, 1960) is a charming collection of these typical Japanese art forms. Elizabeth Kiritani's *Vanishing Japan: Traditions, Crafts & Culture* (Tuttle, 1995) covers a wide spectrum of traditional Japanese crafts and professions that were once a part of daily life from potato vendors, shoe shiners, and tatami makers to Japanese umbrellas and handmade paper, many of which are fast disappearing in today's modern Japan.

And while some might argue it's not art, there's no denying the power *manga* (Japanese comics) has over Japanese readers. Although dated, the best primer in manga history and its various genre is Frederik L. Schodt and Tezuka Osamu's *Manga! Manga!: The World of Japanese Comics* (Kodansha, 1988), with a follow-up provided in Schodt's *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga* (Stone Bridge Press, 1996).

CONTEMPORARY CHRONICLES

For contemporary experiences of foreigners in Japan, there's the inimitable Dave Barry, who describes his whirlwind trip to the land of the rising sun in the comical *Dave Barry Does Japan* (Random House, 1992) and solves such puzzling mysteries as why Japanese cars sell successfully (they're made of steel!). A delightful account of the Japanese and their customs is given by the irrepressible George Mikes in *The Land of the Rising Yen* (Penguin, 1973); I doubt you'll be able to find the book in the United States, but it's in major bookstores in Japan and

would make enjoyable reading during your trip. Rick Kennedy, a longtime resident of Japan, gives a lighthearted view of life in the capital in *Home, Sweet Tokyo: Life in a Weird and Wonderful City* (Kodansha, 1988). A book seemingly from another era is *Geisha* (Vintage, 2000) by Liza C. Dalby; first published in 1983, it describes her year living as a geisha in Kyoto as part of a research project. Alan Booth's *The Roads to Sata* (Kodansha, 1997) chronicles the author's 3,220km (2,000-mile) hike through Japan's four main islands. *Traveler's Tales Guides: Japan* (Traveler's Tales, 1999) relates the first-hand experiences of Dave Barry, Pico Iyer, and other writers who tackle such issues as sand bathing and washlet toilets.

FICTION Whenever I travel in Japan, I especially enjoy reading fictional accounts of the country; they put me more in tune with my surroundings and increase my awareness and perception. The world's first major novel was written by a Japanese woman, Murasaki Shikibu, whose classic, *The Tale of Genji* (Knopf, 1978), dating from the 11th century, describes the aristocratic life of Prince Genji.

In Tokyo bookstores, you'll find whole sections dedicated to English translations of Japan's best-known modern and contemporary authors, including Mishima Yukio, Soseki Natsume, Abe Kobo, Tanizaki Junichiro, and Nobel Prize winners Kawabata Yasunari and Oe Kenzaburo. An overview of Japanese classical literature from the earliest times to the mid-19th century is provided in *Anthology of Japanese Literature* (Grove Press, 1988), edited by Donald Keene. Likewise, *The Showa Anthology: Modern Japanese Short Stories* (Kodansha, 1992), edited by Van C. Gessel and Tomone Matsumoto, covers works by Abe Kobo, Mishima Yukio, Kawabata Yasunari, Oe Kenzaburo, and others

written between 1929 and 1984, while *Modern Japanese Stories: An Anthology* (Tuttle, 1962), edited by Ivan Morris, introduces short stories by some of Japan's top modern writers, including Mori Ogai, Tanizaki Junichiro, Kawabata Yasunari, and Mishima Yukio.

For novels, you might wish to read Mishima's *The Sea of Fertility* (Knopf), a collection of four separate works; *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace With the Sea* (Vintage International, 1994), about a group of boys who react violently to the hypocrisy of the adult world; or *The Sound of Waves* (Knopf, 1956), about young love in a Japanese fishing village. Other famous works by Japanese authors include Soseki Natsume's first novel, *I Am a Cat* (Charles E. Tuttle, 1972), which describes the foibles of upper-middle-class Japanese during the Meiji Era through the eyes of a cat; and his later novel, *Kokoro* (Regnery Gateway Co., 1985), as well as Kawabata Yasunari's *Snow Country* (Knopf, 1956), translated by Edward G. Seidensticker. Although not well known in the West, Enchi Fumiko wrote an absorbing novel about women in an upper-class, late-19th-century family in *The Waiting Years* (Kodansha, 2002), first published in 1957. If your idea of a good read is a fast-paced, action-filled novel, Yoshikawa Eiji's *Taiko: An Epic Novel of War and Glory in Feudal Japan* (Kodansha) gives an engrossing account of the quest for power at the end of the 16th century.

Oe Kenzaburo gained international recognition when he became the second Japanese to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1994. In addition to such well-known novels as *A Personal Matter* (Grove Press, 1968), about a man in search of himself after the birth of a handicapped son, and *Hiroshima Notes* (Grove/Atlantic, 1996), with personal accounts of atomic bomb survivors and a moving

commentary on the meaning of the Hiroshima bombing, is one of his latest works, *A Healing Family* (Kodansha, 1996), a collection of essays written over several years dealing primarily with Oe's severely handicapped autistic son, Hikari, who has become a celebrity in his own right as a composer of classical music. Favorite writers of Japan's baby-boom generation include Murakami Ryu, who burst onto the literary scene with *Almost Transparent Blue* (Kodansha, 1977) and later captured the undercurrent of decadent urban life in his best-selling *Coin Locker Babies* (Kodansha, 1995). Murakami Haruki's writings include *Dance Dance Dance* (Kodansha, 1994); *Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World* (Vintage, 1993); *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle* (Knopf, 1997), which centers on the massacre of Japanese troops in Mongolia by Soviet soldiers in 1939; *South of the Border, West of the Sun* (Knopf, 1999), the story of a bewildered man in contemporary Tokyo; and *Norwegian Wood* (Vintage, 2000), a coming-of-age story set during the 1969 student movement in Japan. His *After the Quake: Stories* (Knopf, 2002) centers on fictional characters in the months after the 1995 Kobe earthquake. Yoshimoto Banana's first novel, *Kitchen* (Washington Square Press, 1993), about free-spirited young women in contemporary Japan, created a "Bananamania" when first published in Japan in 1988.

For works of fiction about Japan by Western writers, most Westerners are familiar with James Clavell's *Shogun* (Dell, 1975), a fictional account (and later a television miniseries) based on the lives of Englishman William Adams and military leader Tokugawa Ieyasu around 1600. The best-selling *Memoirs of a Geisha* (Knopf, 1997), deftly written by Arthur Golden, is the fictional autobiography of a fisherman's daughter who was sold to a geisha house and later became one of Kyoto's most celebrated geisha of the 1930s.

For fictional yet personal contemporary accounts of what it's like for Westerners living in Japan, entertaining novels include *Ransom* (Vintage, 1985) by Jay McInerney; *Pictures from the Water Trade* (Harper & Row, 1986) by John D. Morley; and *Max Danger: The Adventures of an Expat in Tokyo* (Tuttle, 1987) by Robert J. Collins. Pico Iyer taps into the mysterious juxtaposition of the old Japan versus the new in *The Lady and the Monk: Four Seasons in Kyoto* (Knopf, 1991). *Audrey Hepburn's Neck* (Simon & Schuster, 1996) is Alan Brown's poignant portrait of Japan's mishmash of Western and Japanese culture, as seen through the eyes of a confused young Japanese comic illustrator. Mystery fans should read Sujata Massey's six novels following the adventures of Japanese-American Rei Shimura; Massey's latest, *The Samurai's Daughter* (HarperCollins, 2003), delves into atrocities committed during World War II.

FAST FACTS: Japan

American Express There are no American Express customer-service offices in Japan.

Business Hours Government offices and private companies are generally open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Banks are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 3pm, while neighborhood post offices are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm. Major post offices, however, are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm and sometimes

Saturday mornings as well. (Some central post offices, such as those in Tokyo and Osaka, are open 24 hr. for mail.)

Department stores are generally open from about 10am to 7:30 or 8pm; they sometimes close irregularly (but always the same day of the week). Since closed days differ for each department store, you can always find several that are open, even on Sunday. Smaller stores are generally open from about 10am to 8pm and are closed 1 day a week. Convenience stores are open 24 hours.

Drugstores Drugstores, called *kusuri-ya*, are found readily in Japan. However, note that you cannot have a prescription filled in Japan without first consulting a doctor in Japan, so it's best to bring an adequate supply of important medicines with you. No drugstores in Japan stay open 24 hours. However, convenience stores, open day and night throughout Japan, carry such nonprescription items as aspirin.

Earthquakes Kobe's tragic 1995 earthquake brought attention to the fact that Japan is earthquake-prone, but in reality, most earthquakes are too small to detect. However, in case of an earthquake you can feel, there are a few precautions you should take. If you're indoors, take cover under a doorway or against a wall and do not go outdoors. If you're outdoors, stay away from trees, power lines, and the sides of buildings; if you're surrounded by tall buildings, seek cover in a doorway. Never use elevators during a quake. Other precautions include noting emergency exits wherever you stay; all hotels supply flashlights, usually found attached to your bedside table.

Electricity The electricity throughout Japan is 100 volts AC, but there are two different cycles in use: In Tokyo and in regions northeast of the capital, it's 50 cycles, while in Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka, and all points to the southwest, it's 60 cycles. Leading hotels in Tokyo often have two outlets, one for 110 volts and one for 220 volts; almost all have hair dryers in the rooms. You can use many American appliances in Japan because the American standard is 110 volts and 60 cycles, but they may run a little slowly. Note, too, that the flat, two-legged prongs used in Japan are the same size and fit as in North America, but three-pronged appliances are not accepted. For sensitive equipment, either have it adjusted or use batteries if it's also battery-operated.

Embassies & Consulates The embassies of most countries are located in Tokyo.

- **U.S. Embassy:** 1–10–5 Akasaka, Minato-ku, near Toranomon subway station (☎ 03/3224-5000; consular section open Mon–Fri 8:30am–12:30pm and 2–4pm; telephone inquiries accepted Mon–Fri 8:30am–1pm and 2–5:30pm).
- **Canadian Embassy:** 7–3–38 Akasaka, Minato-ku, near Aoyama-Itchome Station (☎ 03/5412-6200; consular section open Mon–Fri 9am–noon and 1:30–5pm).
- **British Embassy:** 1 Ichibancho, Chiyoda-ku, near Hanzomon Station (☎ 03/3265-5511; consular section open Mon–Fri 9am–noon and 2–4pm).
- **Embassy of Ireland:** 5th floor, 2–10–7 Kojimachi, Chiyoda-ku, near Hanzomon Station, exit 4 (☎ 03/3263-0695; open Mon–Fri 10am–12:30pm and 2–4pm; telephone inquiries accepted Mon–Fri 9:30am–5:30pm).

- **Australian Embassy:** 2–1–14 Mita, Minato-ku (☎ 03/5232-4111; open Mon–Fri 9am–12:30pm and 1:30–4:30pm; make an appointment for the consular section). A 15-minute walk from Shiba-koen Station; or take a taxi from Kamyacho, Mita, Hamamatsucho, or Tamachi.
- **New Zealand Embassy:** 20–40 Kamiyama-cho, Shibuya-ku, a 15-minute walk from Shibuya Station (☎ 03/3467-2271; consular section open Mon–Fri 9am–12:30pm and 1:30–5pm).

Since most visa or passport sections are open only at certain times during the day, it's best to call in advance.

The U.S. Embassy, British Embassy, and several other embassies maintain consulates in some other major cities; for information regarding location, inquire at the respective embassies.

Emergencies The national emergency numbers are ☎ 110 for calling police and ☎ 119 for calling an ambulance and for reporting a fire. You do not need to insert any money into public telephones to call these numbers, but you must push a red button before dialing. Be sure to speak slowly and precisely.

Internet Access Most upper-range hotels in the big cities are used to catering to international business travelers and therefore offer in-room dataports—either high-speed or dial-up—for computer hookups as well as adapters to let you access the Internet. Some even have interactive TVs that provide Internet access. Fees for in-room connections run from ¥500 to ¥1,500 (\$4.15–\$13) a day. Many offer business centers as well, most of which are equipped with computers for guest use (a fee may be charged). Otherwise, most major cities in Japan have Internet cafes where you can check e-mail either by paying a fee or by purchasing a drink or a meal. Check individual city and regional chapters for information on Internet cafes and hotels with Internet access. Finally, Nippon Telegraph & Telephone (NTT) operates newer public telephone models equipped with a modular jack for portable computer hookups, making it possible to scan websites and receive e-mail. Look for gray ISDN telephones—readily available in lobbies of major hotels, airports, and train stations—which have English explanations on how to use them and which accept prepaid telephone cards.

Laundry/Dry Cleaning All upper-bracket and most medium-range hotels offer laundry and dry-cleaning services. For same-day service, you are usually required to hand over your laundry by 10am; many hotels do not offer laundry service on Sundays and holidays. Several Japanese-style accommodations in the budget category have coin-operated washers and dryers. Otherwise, launderettes are abundant.

Liquor Laws The legal drinking age is 20. Note that if you intend to drive in Japan, you are not allowed even one drink.

Lost & Found Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen, and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an

emergency credit card in a day or two. Visa's U.S. emergency number is ☎ 800/847-2911; in Japan it's ☎ 00531/11-1555. American Express card-holders can call ☎ 800/233-5432, while traveler's check holders should call ☎ 800/221-7282. In Japan, the emergency number for American Express is ☎ 6565/35-1561. MasterCard holders should call ☎ 800/MC-Assist in the U.S. or ☎ 00531/11-3886 in Japan. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ☎ 800/555-1212.

Luggage & Lockers Because storage space on Shinkansen bullet trains is limited, travel with the smallest bag you can get away with. Coin-operated lockers are located at all major train stations as well as at most subway stations, but most lockers are generally not large enough to store huge pieces of luggage (and those that are large enough are often taken). Lockers generally cost ¥300 to ¥700 (\$2.50–\$5.85) depending on the size. Some major stations also have check-in rooms for luggage, though these tend to be rare. And if your bag becomes too much to handle, you can have it sent ahead via *takkyubin*, a wonderful and efficient luggage/parcel forwarding service available at most upper-range hotels and all convenience stores in Japan. At Narita and Kansai international airports, delivery service counters will send luggage to your hotel the next day (or vice versa) for about ¥2,000 (\$17) for bags up to 20 kilograms (44 lb.).

Mail If your hotel cannot mail letters for you, ask the concierge where the nearest post office is. Post offices are easily recognizable by the red logo of a capital T with a horizontal line over it. Mailboxes are bright orange-red. It costs ¥110 (90¢) to airmail letters weighing up to 25 grams and ¥70 (60¢) for postcards to North America and Europe. Domestic mail costs ¥80 (65¢) for letters weighing up to 25 grams and ¥50 (40¢) for postcards.

Although all **post offices** are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm, international post offices (often located close to the central train station) are open much later; often until 7pm and sometimes on Saturday from 9am to 5pm (in Tokyo and Osaka, counters are open 24 hr.). It is only at these larger post offices that you can mail packages abroad. Conveniently, they sell cardboard boxes in four sizes with the necessary tape and string. Packages mailed abroad cannot weigh more than 20 kilograms (about 44 lb.). A package weighing 10 kilograms (about 22 lb.) will cost ¥6,750 (\$56) to North America via surface mail and will take about a month. Express packages, which take 3 days to North America and can weigh up to 30 kilograms (66 lb.), cost ¥14,000 (\$117) for 10 kilograms (22 lb.).

Maps The Japan National Tourist Organization publishes a free *Tourist Map of Japan* showing the four main islands and the major highway and railway lines, with maps of 11 cities on the reverse side. It also distributes free maps of Tokyo and Kyoto, available at Tourist Information Centers. In addition, free city maps are available at local tourist offices throughout Japan.

Newspapers & Magazines Three English-language newspapers are published daily in Japan: the *Japan Times*, the *Daily Yomiuri* (with weekly supplements from the *Los Angeles Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Chicago Tribune*), and the *International Herald Tribune/Asahi Shimbun*. Hotels and major bookstores carry the international edition of such newsmagazines

as *Time* and *Newsweek*. For regional publications detailing what's going on in a city, check with the local tourist information offices (see the regional chapters). You can also read the *Japan Times* online at www.japantimes.co.jp.

Police The national emergency number for police is ☎ **110**. You do not need to insert any money into public telephones to call this number, but you must push a red button before dialing.

Radio & TV For English-language radio programs, AFN Eagle 810 (at 810 kHz) is the English-language radio station operated by the U.S. military, with news updates on the hour, music, talk shows, and sports events from the United States as well as Tokyo sumo matches. Tokyo's J-Wave (81.3 MHz) broadcasts programs in English with a wide range of music. InterFM (76.1 MHz) in Tokyo specializes in foreign-language broadcasts including adult contemporary music and information, mostly in English but also in French, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, and other languages.

If you enjoy watching television, you've come to the wrong country. Almost nothing is broadcast in English; even foreign films are dubbed in Japanese. However, if you have what's called a **bilingual television**, you can switch from Japanese to the original language to hear programs and movies in English. Most of the upper-range hotels offer bilingual TVs, though note that there are very few English movies and sitcoms broadcast each week (and most of these are fairly old). In my opinion, a major plus of bilingual TVs is that they allow you to listen to the nightly national news broadcast by NHK at 7 and 10pm. Otherwise, major hotels in larger cities also have cable TV with English-language programs including CNN broadcasts and BBC World as well as in-house pay movies. Note, however, that CNN is sometimes broadcast in Japanese only, particularly in outlying areas. On the other hand, even if you don't understand Japanese, I suggest that you watch TV at least once; maybe you'll catch a samurai series. Commercials are also worth watching.

A word on those **pay video programs** offered by hotels and many resort ryokan: Upper-range hotels usually have a few choices in English, and these are charged automatically to your bill. Most business hotels usually offer only one kind of pay movie; since the descriptions are usually in Japanese only, I'll clear up the mystery—they're generally "adult entertainment" programs. If you're traveling with children, you'll want to be extremely careful about selecting your TV programs. Many adult video pay channels appear with a simple push of the channel-selector button, and they can be difficult to get rid of.

In budget accommodations, you may come across televisions with coin boxes attached to their sides. Occasionally this means that the TVs can be activated only by inserting coins into the box; I call these coin-operated TVs. But if the TV functions without having to insert coins, the coin box is for those special adult entertainment videos. Now you know.

Restrooms If you need a restroom, your best bets are at train and subway stations (though these tend to be dirty), big hotels, department stores, and fast-food restaurants. Use of restrooms is free in Japan, but since public facilities often do not supply toilet paper, it's a good idea to carry a packet of tissues.

To find out whether a stall is empty, knock on the door. If it's occupied, someone will knock back. Similarly, if you're inside a stall and someone knocks, answer with a knock back or else the person will just keep on knocking persistently and try to get in. And don't be surprised if you go into some restrooms and find men's urinals and individual private stalls in the same room. Women are supposed to simply walk right past the urinals without noticing them.

Many toilets in Japan, especially those at train stations, are **Japanese style**: They're holes in the ground over which you squat facing the end that has a raised hood. Men stand and aim for the hole. Although Japanese lavatories may seem uncomfortable at first, they're actually much more sanitary because no part of your body touches anything.

Across Japan, the rage nowadays is **washlet toilets**, combination toilet/bidets with heated toilet seats and buttons and knobs directing sprays of water of various intensities and temperatures to various body parts. But alas, instructions are only in Japanese. The voice of experience: Don't stand up until you've figured out how to turn the darn spray off.

Smoking In 1999, lung cancer surpassed stomach cancer as Japan's major cancer-related death. Still, it sometimes seems as though every adult in Japan smokes. Some 60% of Japanese men smoke (15% of women), and although this figure is down from 85% in 1965, those who do smoke have little consciousness of nonsmokers' rights. Few restaurants have nonsmoking sections. On the other hand, virtually all upper-range hotels now have designated nonsmoking floors, a trend which is trickling down to moderately priced hotels (most business hotels, however, do not have nonsmoking rooms). If you want to sit in the nonsmoking car of the Shinkansen bullet train, ask for the *kinensha*. During peak travel times, be sure to reserve a seat in the nonsmoking car in advance.

Taxes There's a 5% consumption tax imposed on goods and services in Japan, including hotel rates and restaurant meals. Some budget accommodations include the tax in their tariff, while others don't; be sure to ask whether rates include tax (rates given in this guide do not include tax unless stated otherwise). In hot-spring resorts, accommodations with hot-spring baths also levy a nightly ¥150 (\$1.25) hot-spring tax. In Tokyo, hotels levy a separate tax of ¥100 (85¢) per person per night on rooms costing ¥10,000 to ¥14,999 (\$83–\$125); rates ¥15,000 (\$125) and up are taxed at ¥200 (\$1.65).

In addition to these taxes, a 10% to 15% **service charge** will be added to your bill in lieu of tipping at most of the fancier restaurants and at moderately priced and upper-end hotels. Thus, the 15% to 20% in tax and service charge that will be added to your bill in the more expensive locales can really add up. Most ryokan, or Japanese-style inns, include a service charge but not a consumption tax in their rates. If you're not sure, ask. Business hotels, minshuku, youth hostels, and inexpensive restaurants do not impose a service charge.

As for **shopping**, a 5% consumption tax is also levied on most goods. (Some of the smaller vendors are not required to levy tax.) Travelers from abroad, however, are eligible for an exemption on goods taken out of the country, although only the larger department stores and specialty

shops seem equipped to deal with the procedures. In any case, most department stores grant a refund on the consumption tax only when the total amount of purchases for the day exceeds ¥10,000 (\$83). You can obtain a refund immediately by having a sales clerk fill out a list of your purchases and then presenting the list to the tax-exemption counter of the department store; you will need to show your passport. Note that no refunds for consumption tax are given for food, drinks, tobacco, cosmetics, film, and batteries.

Telephones To call Japan: For dialing Japan, the country code is **81**. In addition, all telephone area codes for all of Japan's cities begin with a zero: Tokyo's area code, for example, is 03, while Osaka's is 06. For other area codes, check the listings for each city in this guide. Use the entire area code only when dialing from outside the area but from within Japan. When calling Japan from abroad, it is usually necessary to drop the zero in the area code. When calling from the United States, for example, dial 011 for the international access code, 81 for Japan, followed by only 3 for Tokyo (not 03) and 6 (not 06) for Osaka. If you have questions, call the international operator in the country from which you are placing your call.

Domestic calls: If you're staying in a medium- or upper-range hotel, you can make local, domestic, and international calls from your room. It's cheaper, however, to use a **public telephone**. You can find public telephones virtually everywhere—in telephone booths on the sidewalk, on stands outside shops, on train platforms, in restaurants and coffee shops, even on bullet trains (but these require a magnetic telephone card; see below). A local call costs ¥10 (8¢) for each minute; a warning chime will ring to tell you to insert more coins or you'll be disconnected. I usually insert two or three coins at the start so I won't have to worry about being disconnected; ¥10 (8¢) coins that aren't used are always returned at the end of the call. Some older, red models available for public use outside ma-and-pa shops accept only ¥10 (8¢) coins, but most public phones accept both ¥10 (8¢) and ¥100 (85¢) coins. The latter are convenient for long-distance calls. All gray, ISDN telephones are equipped for international calls and have dataports for Internet access.

If you think you'll be making a lot of domestic calls from public telephones and don't want to deal with coins, purchase a magnetic, **prepaid telephone card**. These are available in values of ¥500 (\$4.15) and ¥1,000 (\$8.35) and are sold at vending machines (many of which are located right beside telephones), station kiosks, and even at tourist attractions, where cards are imprinted with photos of temples, castles, and other sights (but are also often more expensive than regular telephone cards since they double as collectors' items). Green and gray telephones accept telephone cards. In fact, many nowadays accept only telephone cards; simply insert the card into the slot. On the gray ISDN telephones, there's a second slot for a second telephone card, which is convenient if the first one is almost used up or if you think you'll be talking a long time. Domestic long-distance calls are 20% to 40% cheaper at night, on weekends, and on national holidays for calls of distances more than 60km (37 miles).

Of course, you can also avoid public telephones altogether by joining what seems like the rest of the population and using a **mobile phone**, a

keitai denwa (more than 80 million Japanese have cellphones). Unfortunately, Japan uses a system that is incompatible with GSM or the U.S. system. Your best bet may be to rent a cellphone before leaving home (see “The 21st-Century Traveler,” earlier in this chapter). Or, if you’re flying All Nippon Airways from North America, you might qualify for complimentary cellphone usage during your stay (contact ANA). Cellphones can also be rented from stores at Narita and Kansai international airports. Otherwise, if you’re in Japan for only a few days and are staying in an upper-class hotel in a major city, it’s probably most convenient to rent a mobile phone from your hotel. A quick check of several hotels in Tokyo turned up an average rental fee of ¥2,000 (\$17) per day, with placed calls costing an extra ¥330 (\$2.75) per minute (there is no charge for incoming calls). For extended stays, you’re better off purchasing a mobile phone. **Tu-Ka** and **Au** are two major cellphone companies, with outlets seemingly on every corner. Basic phones cost ¥4,800 to ¥5,800 (\$40–\$48), plus you’ll have to purchase special prepaid cards (available at convenience stores) that are good for a limited number of calls within 3 months or so. There are many plans available.

Toll-free numbers in Japan begin with **0120** or **0088**. However, calling a 1-800 number in the States from Japan is not toll-free but costs the same as an international call.

To make international calls: There are several ways to make international calls. For a collect call or to place an operator-assisted call through KDDI (one of several Japanese telephone companies), dial the international telephone operator at ☎ **0051**. From a public telephone, look for a specially marked International and Domestic Card/Coin Telephone. Although many of the specially marked green or gray telephones, the most common public telephone, accept both coins and magnetic telephone cards for domestic calls, most do not accept magnetic cards for international calls (due to illegal usage of telephone cards), especially in big cities. Rather, you’ll have to purchase a pre-paid international telephone card, often sold from a vending machine next to telephone booths in hotels or in convenience stores like 7-Eleven or Lawson. There are numerous such cards (with instructions in English), such as the Brastel Smart Phonecard (☎ **0120/659-543**), Telecom’s Moshi Moshi Card (☎ **0088/223-133**), the KDDI Superworld Card (☎ **0057**), and NTT’s World Prepaid Card (☎ **0120/535-603**). Essentially, they work like telephone cards issued by U.S. telephone companies. An access number must first be dialed, followed by a secret telephone number and then the number you wish to dial. NTT also has its own IC Card Payphones (found mostly in hotel lobbies) with its own card (sold in adjacent vending machines), which you insert into the phone. Some hotels also have special phones equipped to accept credit cards.

International rates vary according to when you call, which telephone company you use, and what type of service you use. Direct-dial service is cheaper than operator-assisted calls and is offered by both international public telephones and by hotels that advertise the service (though remember to ask about the surcharge). You can also save money by

calling between 11pm and 8am Japan time, when rates are up to 40% cheaper than during a weekday. From 7 to 11pm, rates are 20% cheaper than daytime rates on weekdays. Weekend day rates are also 20% cheaper than weekday rates. KDDI's weekday prime-time rate is ¥450 (\$3.75) for 3 minutes; after 11pm, the rate drops to ¥350 (\$2.90) for 3 minutes.

If you're not using a prepaid card (which has its own set of instructions and access numbers), to make a direct-dial international call you must first dial one of the international access codes—**001** (KDDI), **0041** (Japan Telecom), **0033** (NTT-Com), or **0061** (IDC)—followed by **010** and then the country code. The country code for the United States and Canada is **1**; for the United Kingdom, it's **44**; for Australia, it's **61**; and for New Zealand, it's **64**. To call the United States, for example, simply dial an access code such as 001, followed by 010, the country code 1, the area code, and the telephone number. If you're dialing from your hotel room, you must first dial for an outside line, usually 0.

If you wish to be connected with an operator in your home country, you can do so from green international telephones by dialing ☎ **0039** followed by a three digit country code. (For the United States, dial **0039-111**.) These calls can be used for collect calls or credit card calls. Some hotels and other public places are equipped with special phones that will link you to your home operator with the push of a button, and there are instructions in English.

If you have a U.S. calling card, ask your phone company for the direct access number from Japan that will link you directly to the United States. If you have AT&T, for example, dial **00539-111** (you can also pay by credit card at this number for calls made to the United States); if you're using MCI, however, it depends on which Japanese company you're using (for KDD, it's **0053-121**).

Time Zone Japan is 9 hours ahead of Greenwich mean time, 14 hours ahead of New York, 15 hours ahead of Chicago, and 17 hours ahead of Los Angeles. Since Japan does not go on daylight savings time, subtract 1 hour from the above times in the summer when calling from countries that have daylight savings time such as the United States.

Because Japan is on the other side of the international dateline, you lose a day when traveling from the United States to Asia. (If you depart the United States on Tues, you'll arrive on Wed.) Returning to North America, however, you gain a day, which means that you arrive on the same day you left. (In fact, it often happens that you arrive in the states at an earlier hour than you departed from Japan.)

Tipping One of the delights of being in Japan is that there's no tipping—not even to waitresses, taxi drivers, or bellhops. If you try to tip them, they'll probably be confused or embarrassed. Instead, you'll have a 10% to 15% service charge added to your bill at higher-priced hotels and restaurants.

Water The water is safe to drink anywhere in Japan, although some people claim it's too highly chlorinated. Bottled water is also readily available.

Settling into Tokyo

To the uninitiated, Tokyo may seem like a whirlwind of traffic and people, so confusing that visitors might think they have somehow landed on another planet. Little wonder first-time visitors are almost invariably disappointed. They come expecting an exotic Asian city, but instead they find a city Westernized and modernized to the point of ugliness, much of it a drab concrete jungle of unimaginative buildings clustered so close together that there's hardly room in which to breathe.

Simply stated, Tokyo is a crush of humanity. Its subways are often packed, its sidewalks are crowded, its streets are congested, and its air is filled with noise, pollution, and what can only be called mystery smells. Approximately 12 million people live in its 2,072 sq. km (800 sq. miles), many of them in bedroom towns from which they have to commute to work for an average of 2 to 3 hours every day. No matter where you go in Tokyo, you're never alone. After you've been here for a while, Paris, London, and even New York will seem deserted.

Crowds and urban ugliness, however, are what you'll see only if you don't bother to look beneath the surface. For Tokyo is alluring in its own way, and if you open yourself to it you'll find a city unlike any other in the world, humming with energy and vitality. People rush around here with such purpose, such determination, it's hard not to feel that you're in the midst of something important, that you're witnessing history in the making.

A LOOK AT THE PAST Though today the nation's capital, Tokyo is a

relative newcomer to the pages of Japanese history. For centuries it was nothing more than a rather unimportant village called Edo, which means simply "mouth of the estuary." In 1603, Edo was catapulted into the limelight when the new shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, made the sleepy village the seat of his government. He expanded Edo Castle, making it the largest and most impressive castle in the land, and surrounded it with an ingenious system of moats that radiated from the castle in a great swirl, giving him easy access to the sea and an upper hand in thwarting enemy attack.

The town developed quickly, due largely to the shogun's decree requiring all *daimyo* (feudal lords) to permanently leave their families in Edo, a shrewd move to thwart insurrection in the provinces. There were as many as 270 *daimyo* in Japan in the 17th century, all of whom maintained several mansions in Edo, complete with elaborate compounds and expansive gardens. The *daimyos'* trusted samurai soon accounted for more than half of Edo's population, and the merchant class expanded as well. By 1787 the population had grown to 1.3 million, making Edo—even then—one of the largest cities in the world.

When the Tokugawas were overthrown in 1868, the Japanese emperor was restored to power and moved the capital from Kyoto to Edo, now renamed Tokyo (Eastern Capital). Japan's Feudal Era—and its isolation from the rest of the world—was over. As the capital city, Tokyo was the

hardest hit in this new era of modernization, with fashion, architecture, food, and even people imported from the West. West was best, and things Japanese were forgotten or ignored.

It didn't help that Tokyo was almost totally destroyed twice in the first half of the 20th century: In 1923, a massive earthquake measuring 7.9 on the Richter scale destroyed more than a third of the city and claimed more than 100,000 lives; disaster struck again in 1945, toward the end of World War II, when Allied incendiary bombs laid more than half the city to waste and killed another 100,000 people.

TOKYO TODAY Perhaps that's why most visitors are disappointed with Tokyo—it has almost nothing of historical importance to match Kyoto or Kamakura. So put your notions of quaint Japan out of your mind and plunge headfirst into the 21st century, because that's what Tokyo is all about. In fact, in the past few years, skyscrapers and new developments have been mushrooming faster than you can say *shiitake*, some of them the most ambitious land projects Japan has ever seen.

As the financial nerve center of Japan, Tokyo has long set the pace for what happens in the rest of Asia. The city is so wired and electric you can feel it in the air. It's the reigning capital of Asian pop art and kitsch, fads and trends.

But even though the city has a fast-paced, somewhat zany side, it also has a quieter and often overlooked side that makes the city both loveable and livable. Although formidable at first glance, Tokyo is nothing more than a

series of small towns and neighborhoods clustered together, each with its own atmosphere, narrow, winding streets, mom-and-pop shops, fruit stands, and stores. Look for the details, and you'll notice carefully pruned bonsai adorning the sidewalks; old women in kimono shuffling down the streets; traditional wooden houses tucked between massive apartment complexes; everywhere, neatness and order. Peer inside those concrete high-rises, and you're apt to find Japanese restaurants that are perfect replicas of wood-beamed farmhouses side-by-side with cocktail bars that epitomize high-tech avant-garde.

I personally love Tokyo. Despite its daily frustrations, Tokyo is exhilarating, often exciting, and unceasingly interesting. Best of all, it's one of the world's safest metropolises, with the lowest theft rate of any large city on the planet. Although common sense dictates I avoid public parks after dark when I'm out alone and watch my purse in crowded subways, I otherwise walk without fear anywhere and anytime in Tokyo, day or night. The city's safety is best illustrated by what an American friend living in Tokyo was told when her daughter started first grade in a Japanese school: Parents were to refrain from walking their children to or from school, allowing, instead, the children to walk on their own.

Perhaps the only thing in Tokyo you have to watch out for are those Japanese businessmen who've had too much to drink—reserve thrown off, they might want to practice their English on you.

1 Orientation

ARRIVING BY PLANE

There are two airports serving Tokyo, but most likely you'll arrive at the **Narita International Airport**, 65km (40 miles) outside Tokyo. If you're arriving in Tokyo from elsewhere in Japan, your flight will probably land at **Haneda Airport**, used primarily for domestic flights.

FACILITIES AT NARITA AIRPORT Narita International Airport (☎ 0476/34-5000) consists of two terminals, Terminal 1 and Terminal 2. Arrival lobbies in both terminals have banks for money exchange open daily 6am to 11pm as well as ATMs (change money here, as facilities are limited in town) and are connected to all ground transportation to Tokyo.

A **Tourist Information Center (TIC)**, managed by the Japan National Tourist Organization, is located in the arrival lobbies of both Terminal 1 (☎ 0476/30-3383) and Terminal 2 (☎ 0476/34-6251). The TIC offers free maps and pamphlets and can direct you to your hotel or inn. Both are open daily 9am to 8pm; if you don't yet have a hotel room and want one at a modest price, you can make reservations here free of charge Monday through Friday until 7:30pm.

If you've purchased a Japan Rail Pass, you can turn in your voucher at one of the **Japan Railways (JR) View Plazas** (Travel Service Centers), located in both Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 and open daily 6:45am to 9:45pm. Other facilities at both terminals include post offices, medical clinics, shower rooms, day rooms for napping, and children's playrooms. Departure lounges of both terminals also have coin-operated computers with Internet capabilities (¥100/85¢ for 10 min.).

GETTING TO TOKYO FROM NARITA AIRPORT Jumping into a **taxi** is the easiest way to get to Tokyo, but it's also prohibitively expensive—and may not even be the quickest if you happen to hit rush hour. Expect to spend around ¥25,000 (\$208) or more for a 1½ to 2-hour taxi ride from Narita.

By Bus The most popular way to get from Narita to Tokyo is via the **Airport Limousine Bus** (☎ 03/3665-7220; www.limousinebus.co.jp), which picks up passengers and their luggage from just outside the arrival lobbies of terminals 1 and 2 and delivers them to downtown hotels. This is the best mode of transportation if you have heavy baggage or are staying at one of the many hotels served by the bus. Buses travel most frequently to the **Tokyo City Air Terminal (TCAT)**, located in downtown Tokyo and reached in about 70 minutes. Buses also depart frequently—up to five times an hour during peak times—for Tokyo Station and Shinjuku Station. They also serve more than 40 major hotels on a less frequent schedule—generally once an hour—and it can take almost 2 hours to reach a hotel in Shinjuku. Check with the staff at the Airport Limousine Bus counter in the arrival lobbies to inquire which bus stops nearest your hotel, and its departure time. Fares for the limousine bus average ¥2,700 to ¥3,000 (\$23–\$25), based on distance traveled; children 6 to 12 are charged half-fare; those under 6 ride free.

If you take a limousine bus into Tokyo, plenty of taxis are available at the end of the line. TCAT, Shinjuku Station, and Tokyo Station are also served by public transportation; TCAT is connected to the subway Hanzomon Line via moving walkways and escalators; Shinjuku and Tokyo stations are hubs for subway lines and commuter trains.

By Train The quickest way to reach Tokyo is by train, with several options available. Trains depart directly from the airport's two underground stations, called Narita Airport Station (which is in Terminal 1) and Airport Terminal 2 Station.

The **JR Narita Express (NEX)** (☎ 03/3423-0111; www.japanrail.com) is the fastest way to reach Tokyo Station, Shinagawa, Shinjuku, Ikebukuro, and Yokohama, with departures approximately once an hour, or twice an hour during peak hours. The trip to Tokyo Station takes 53 minutes and costs ¥3,140 (\$26)

one-way. The trip to Shinagawa, Shinjuku, or Ikebukuro costs ¥3,310 (\$28). Note, however, that if you have a validated JR Rail Pass, you can ride the NEX free (as mentioned above, you must validate your rail pass at the JR View Plaza, also called the JR Travel Service Center, located in both terminals). Because all seats are reserved, you must first stop by the NEX counter near the train terminal for a seat assignment before boarding the train. Seats are sometimes sold out in advance. (You can reserve a seat in advance at www.world.eki-net.com; see “Getting Around Japan,” in chapter 2 for more information.) Or, if you wish to reserve a seat for your return trip to Narita Airport—and I strongly urge that you do—you can do so here at the NEX counter. Look for a sign that says JR RESERVATION TICKET OFFICE or VIEW PLAZA; in Tokyo you’ll find them at major JR stations. Plan to arrive at Narita 2 hours before departure.

If the NEX is sold out and you’re still determined to use your rail pass, you can take the slower **JR Airport Liner**, which will get you to Tokyo Station in 80 minutes. If you don’t have a rail pass, this rapid train will cost you ¥1,280 (\$11).

An alternative is the privately owned **Keisei Skyliner** train (☎ 03/3831-0131; www.keisei.co.jp), which departs directly from both Narita Airport Station (Terminal 1) and Airport Terminal 2 Station and travels to Ueno Station in Tokyo in about 1 hour, with a stop at Nippori Station on the way. You’ll find Keisei Skyliner counters in the arrival lobbies of both terminals. Trains depart approximately every 40 minutes between 7:49am and 9:58pm. The fare from Narita Airport to Ueno Station in Tokyo is ¥1,920 (\$17) one-way; early-morning and evening fares are cheaper. If you’re on a strict budget, you can take one of Keisei’s slower limited express trains to Ueno Station, with fares starting at ¥1,000 (\$8.70) for the 75-minute trip. At Ueno Station, you can take either the subway or the JR Yamanote Line to other parts of Tokyo. There are also plenty of taxis there.

GETTING TO HANEDA AIRPORT If you’re connecting to a domestic flight, more than likely you’ll need to transfer to Haneda Airport. The **Airport Limousine Bus** makes runs between Narita Airport and Haneda Airport that cost ¥3,000 (\$25). The trip takes about 75 minutes.

GETTING FROM HANEDA AIRPORT INTO CENTRAL TOKYO If you’re arriving by domestic flight at Haneda Airport (☎ 03/5757-8111), located near the center of Tokyo, you can take the **Airport Limousine Bus** to Shinjuku Station, Tokyo Station, or the Tokyo City Air Terminal (TCAT) in downtown Tokyo, and to hotels in Shinjuku, Ikebukuro, and Akasaka. Fares run from ¥900 to ¥1,200 (\$7.50–\$10). The locals, however, are more likely to take the **monorail** from Haneda Airport 15 minutes to Hamamatsucho Station (fare: ¥470/\$3.90) or the **Keikyū Line** 19 minutes to Shinagawa (fare: ¥400/\$3.35). Both Hamamatsucho and Shinagawa connect to the very useful Yamanote Line, which travels to major stations, including Tokyo Station and Shinjuku Station. There is also a Tokyo Tourist Information Center (☎ 03/5757-9345) in Haneda Airport, open daily 9am to 10pm.

BY LAND OR SEA

BY TRAIN If you’re traveling to Tokyo by the Shinkansen bullet train, you’ll probably arrive at either **Tokyo Station** or **Shinagawa Station**, both connected to the rest of the city via JR commuter trains and the subway (avoid Tokyo Station if you can; it’s very big and confusing). Trains from northern Japan also stop at Ueno Station.

BY BUS Long-distance bus service from Hiroshima, Nagoya, Osaka, Kyoto, and other major cities delivers passengers to **Tokyo Station**, which is connected to the rest of the city via subway and commuter train. Other bus terminals serving the region outside Tokyo include Shinagawa and Shinjuku stations, both of which are served by the JR Yamanote Line, which loops around the city.

BY FERRY Long-distance ferries arrive in Tokyo at the **Tokyo Ko Ferry Futo (Tokyo Port Ferry Terminal)**. From there, you can board a bus for Shinkiba JR Station and catch a train to town.

VISITOR INFORMATION

The **Tourist Information Center (TIC)**, 2–10–1 Yurakucho (☎ 03/3201-3331), is located on the 10th floor of a rather obscure office building called Kotsu Kaikan Building next to the JR Yurakucho Station (look for its circular top). Assuming you're able to find them, the TIC staff can answer all your questions regarding Tokyo and Japan, can give you a map of the city plus various sightseeing materials, and will even book inexpensive hotels for you around the country, charging no fee for the service. They're courteous and efficient; I cannot recommend them highly enough. They also have more information than any other tourist office in the rest of Japan, including pamphlets and brochures on major cities and attractions. Be sure to stop here if you plan to visit other destinations, because information in English may not be available at the destination itself. The TIC is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and on Saturday from 9am to noon; closed Sundays and national holidays. Note that the hotel reservation service is available only weekdays 9 to 11:30am and 1 to 4:45pm. Other TIC offices are located in the arrival lobbies of Terminal 1 and Terminal 2 at Narita Airport, open daily from 9am to 8pm.

Another great source of information on Tokyo is the **Tokyo Tourist Information Center**, operated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and located on the first floor of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government (TMG) Building no. 1, 2–8–1 Nishi-Shinjuku (☎ 03/5321-3077; www.tourism.metro.tokyo.jp and www.tcvb.or.jp); you'll probably want to come here anyway for the TMG's great observation floor. It dispenses advice, pamphlets, and its own city map (which I consider better than the one issued by the TIC) and is open daily 10am to 6:30pm. Other city-run information counters are located at Keisei Ueno Station (☎ 03/3836-3471), open daily 9:30am to 6:30pm, and at Haneda Airport (☎ 03/5757-9345), open daily 9am to 10pm.

TOURIST PUBLICATIONS Be sure to pick up *Calendar Events* at the TIC, a monthly leaflet listing festivals, antiques and craft fairs, and other events throughout the metropolitan area. English-language newspapers such as the *Japan Times* and the *Daily Yomiuri* carry information on theater, films, and special events. Of the many free giveaways available at TIC describing restaurants, bars, bookstores, hotels, and other establishments visitors and ex-pats are likely to frequent, best is the weekly *Metropolis*, with features on Tokyo, club listings, and restaurant and movie reviews. *Tokyo Weekender* also carries a section on what's going on in and around the city, including outdoor recreation and activities. Look also for the free *JapanZine*.

CITY LAYOUT

Your most frustrating moments in Tokyo will probably occur when you find that you're totally lost. Maybe it will be in a subway or train station, when all you see are signs in Japanese, or on a street somewhere as you search for a museum, restaurant, or bar. At any rate, accept it here and now: You *will* get lost if you

are at all adventurous and strike out on your own. It's inevitable. But take comfort in the fact that Japanese get lost, too—even taxi drivers! And don't forget that most of the hotel and restaurant listings in this book have the number of minutes (in parentheses) it takes to walk there from the nearest station; if you take note, you'll at least know the radius from the station to your destination. It's wise, too, to always allow extra time to find your way around.

Tokyo, situated at one end of Tokyo Bay and spreading across the Kanto Plain, still retains some of its Edo Period features. If you look at a map, you'll find a large green oasis in the middle of the city, site of the Imperial Palace and its grounds. Surrounding it is the castle moat; a bit farther out are remnants of another circular moat built by the Tokugawa shogun. The JR Yamanote Line forms another loop around the inner city; most of Tokyo's major hotels, nightlife districts, and attractions are near or inside this oblong loop.

For administrative purposes, Tokyo is broken down into **23 wards**, known as *ku*. Its business districts of Marunouchi and Hibiya, for example, are in Chiyoda-ku, while Ginza is part of Chuo-ku (Central Ward). These two *ku* are the historic hearts of Tokyo, for it was here that the city had its humble beginnings.

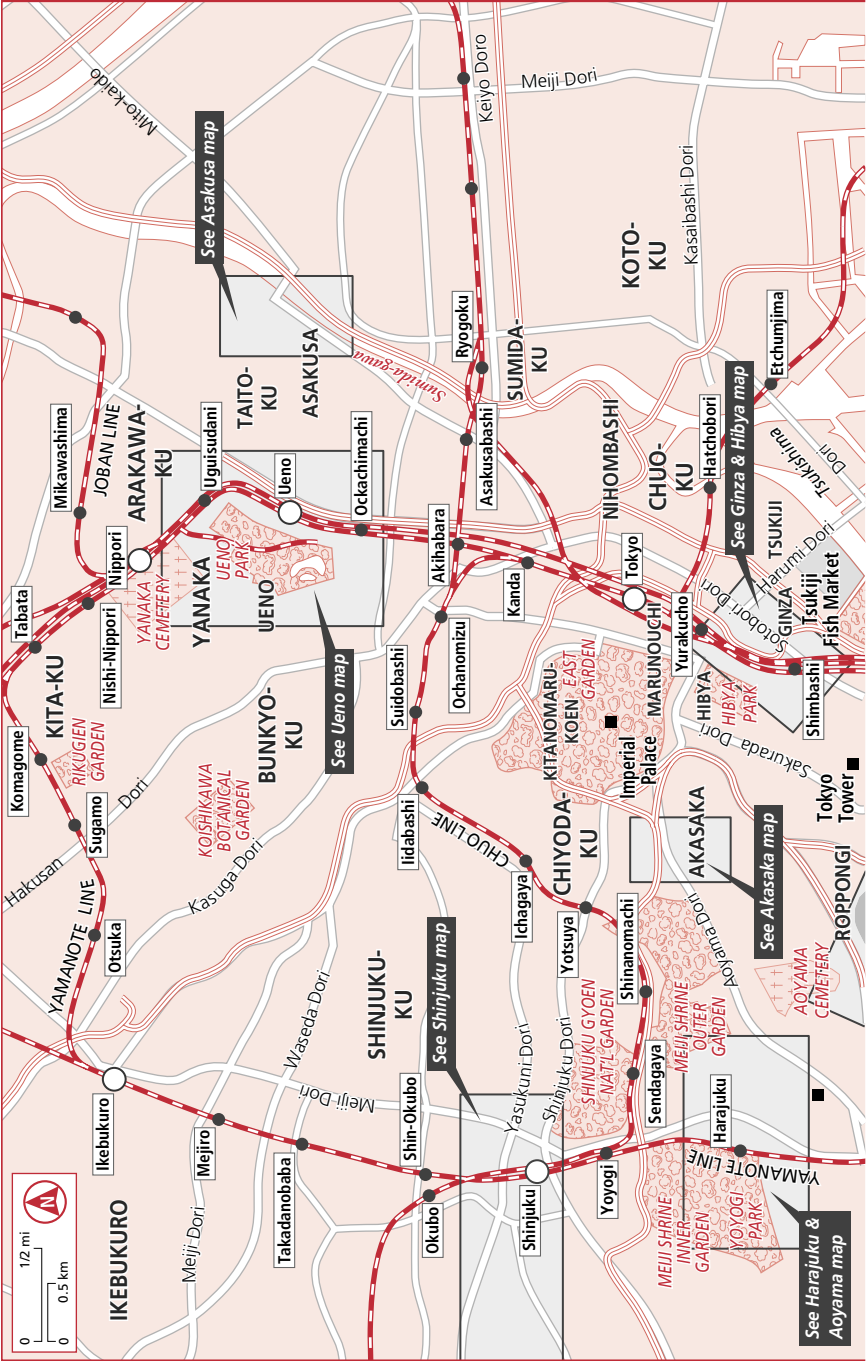
MAIN STREETS & ARTERIES One difficulty in finding your way around Tokyo is that hardly any streets are named. Think about what that means—12 million people living in a huge metropolis of nameless streets. Granted, major thoroughfares and some well-known streets in areas like Ginza and Shinjuku received names after World War II at the insistence of American occupation forces, and a few more have been labeled or given nicknames that only the locals know, but for the most part, Tokyo's address system is based on a complicated number scheme that must make the postal worker's job here a nightmare. To make matters worse, most streets in Tokyo zigzag—an arrangement apparently left over from olden days, to confuse potential attacking enemies. Now they confuse Tokyoites and visitors alike.

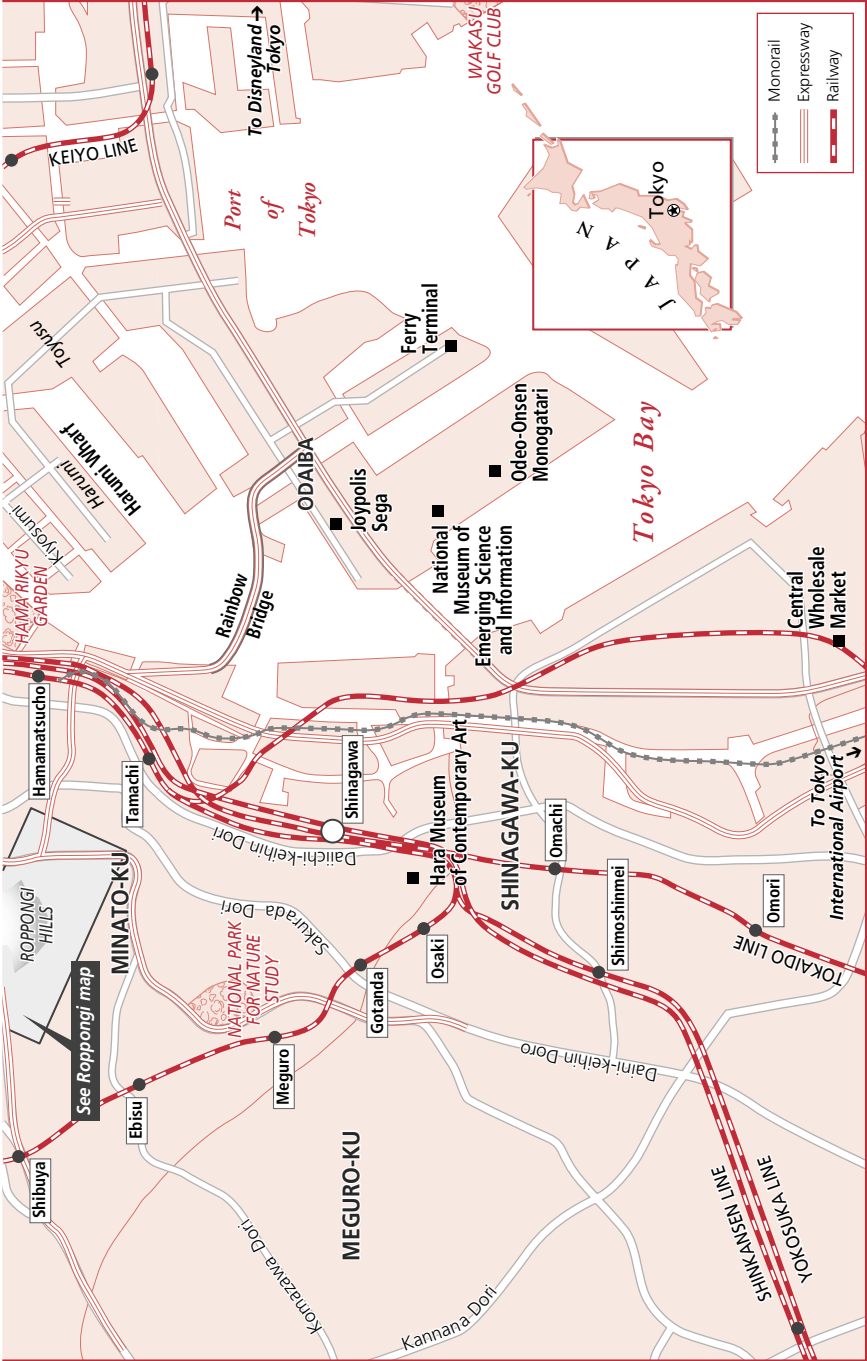
Among Tokyo's most important named streets are **Meiji Dori**, which follows the loop of the Yamanote Line and runs from Ebisu in the south through Shibuya, Harajuku, Shinjuku, and Ikebukuro in the north; **Yasukuni Dori** and **Shinjuku Dori**, which cut across the heart of the city from Shinjuku to Chiyoda-ku; and **Sotobori Dori**, **Chuo Dori**, **Harumi Dori**, and **Showa Dori**, which pass through Ginza. (*Dori* means avenue or street, as does *michi*.)

Intersections in Tokyo are called a crossing; it seems every district has a famous crossing. (**Ginza 4-chome Crossing** is the intersection of Chuo Dori and Harumi Dori. **Roppongi Crossing** is the intersection of Roppongi Dori and Gaien-Higashi Dori.)

ADDRESSES Because streets did not have names when Japan's postal system was established, the country has a unique address system. A typical Tokyo address might read 1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, which is the address of the Tokyo Station Hotel. Chiyoda-ku is the name of the **ward**. Wards are further divided into **districts**, in this case Marunouchi. Marunouchi itself is broken down into **chome** (numbered subsection), here 1-chome. Number 9 refers to a smaller area within the chome—usually an entire block, sometimes larger. Thus, houses on one side of the street will usually have a different middle number than houses on the other side. The last number, in this case 1, refers to the actual building. Although it seems reasonable to assume that next to a number 1 building will be a number 2, that's not always the case; buildings were assigned numbers as they were constructed, not according to location.

Tokyo at a Glance





Addresses are usually, but not always, posted on buildings beside doors, on telephone poles, and by streetlights, but often they are written only in kanji. In recent years, Roman letters have been added to addresses posted below stoplights at major intersections. But one frustrating trend is for new, modern buildings to omit posting any address whatsoever on their facades.

FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND If you're traveling by subway or JR train, the first thing you should do upon exiting your compartment is to look for **signs** posted on every platform that tell you which exit to take for particular buildings, attractions, and chome. At Roppongi Station, for example, you'll find yellow signboards that tell you which exit to take for Roppongi Hills, which will at least get you pointed in the right direction once you emerge from the station. Stations also have maps of the areas either inside the station or at the exit; these are your best plan of attack when trying to find a particular address.

As you walk around Tokyo, you will also notice **maps** posted beside sidewalks giving a breakdown of the postal number system for the area. The first time I tried to use one, I stopped one Japanese, then another, and asked them to point out on the map where a particular address was. They both studied the map and pointed out the direction. Both turned out to be wrong. Not very encouraging, but if you learn how to read these maps, they're invaluable.

Another invaluable source of information is the numerous **police boxes**, called *koban*, located in every neighborhood throughout the city. Police officers have area maps and are very helpful (helping lost souls seems to occupy much of their time). You should also never hesitate to ask a Japanese the way, but be sure to ask more than one. You'll be amazed at the conflicting directions you'll receive. Apparently, the Japanese would rather hazard a guess than impolitely shrug their shoulders and leave you standing there. The best thing to do is ask directions of several Japanese and then follow the majority opinion. You can also duck into a shop and ask someone where a nearby address is, although in my experience employees do not even know the address of their own store. They may, however, have a map of the area.

MAPS Before setting out on your own, arm yourself with a few maps. Maps are so much a part of life in Tokyo that they're often included in shop or restaurant advertisements or brochures, on business cards, and even in private party invitations. Even though I've spent years in Tokyo, I rarely venture forth without a map. The Tourist Information Center issues a *Tourist Map of Tokyo*, which includes a subway map. Better, in my opinion, are the free maps given away by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, including a detailed city map and maps of several districts (such as Shinjuku). Armed with these maps, you should be able to locate at least the general vicinity of every place mentioned in this chapter and the next.

For a detailed map, however, head for **Tower Books**, **Kinokuniya**, or another English-language bookstore (see "Shopping from A to Z," in chapter 4). My own personal favorite is Nippon Kokuseisha's *Map of Central Tokyo*, a compact folding map listing chome and chome subsections for major areas. Another useful tome is Shobunsa's *Tokyo Metropolitan Atlas*, which covers all 23 of Tokyo's wards with specific postal maps, as well as greater Tokyo and its vicinity, along with expressway and Tokyo area road maps. If you plan to spend a lot of time in Tokyo, consider Kodansha's heftier *Tokyo City Atlas*, which has both Japanese and English place names, along with rail and subway maps, district maps, and an index to important buildings, museums, and other places of interest.

Tips Take Your Time

You should always allow more time to reach a destination than you think you'll need. Once you learn how to use the subway and the layout of the city, finding your way around becomes an interesting challenge, with every success a major victory. It's almost like being 4 years old all over again.

TOKYO'S NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Taken as a whole, Tokyo seems formidable and unconquerable. It's best, therefore, to think of it as nothing more than a series of villages scrunched together, much like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Holding the pieces together, so to speak, is the **Yamanote Line**, a commuter train loop around central Tokyo that passes through such important stations as Yurakucho, Tokyo, Ueno, Ikebukuro, Shinjuku, Hara-juku, Shibuya, and Shinagawa. Since 2001, several districts have witnessed massive redevelopment, including Shinagawa, both sides of Tokyo Station, and Roppongi.

Hibiya This is not only the business heart of Tokyo, but its spiritual heart as well. This is where the Tokugawa shogun built his magnificent castle, and was thus the center of old Edo. Today, Hibiya, in Chiyoda-ku Ward, is no less important as the home of the **Imperial Palace**, built on the ruins of Edo Castle and the residence of Japan's 125th emperor. Bordering the palace is the wonderful East Garden, open free to the public.

Ginza Ginza is the swankiest and most expensive **shopping area** in all Japan. When the country opened to foreign trade in the 1860s, following 2 centuries of self-imposed seclusion, it was here that Western imports and adopted Western architecture were first displayed. Today, Ginza is where you'll find a multitude of department stores,

boutiques, exclusive restaurants, hotels, art galleries, and drinking establishments. On the edge of Ginza is **Kabukiza**, venue for Kabuki productions.

Tsukiji Located only two subway stops from Ginza, Tsukiji was born from reclaimed land during the Tokugawa shogunate; its name, in fact, means "reclaimed land." Today it's famous for the **Tsukiji Fish Market**, one of the largest wholesale fish markets in the world. Nearby is the Hama Rikyu Garden, considered by some to be the best garden in Tokyo.

Akihabara Tokyo's center for electronic and electrical appliances has more than 600 shops offering a look at the latest in gadgets and gizmos. A stop on the Yamanote Line, this is a fascinating place for a stroll, even if you aren't interested in buying anything.

Asakusa In the northeastern part of central Tokyo, Asakusa served as the pleasure quarters for old Edo. Today it's known throughout Japan as the site of the famous **Sensoji Temple**, one of Tokyo's top and oldest attractions. It also has a wealth of tiny shops selling traditional Japanese crafts. When Tokyoites talk about *shitamachi* (old downtown), they are referring to the traditional homes and tiny narrow streets of the Asakusa and Ueno areas.

Ueno Located just west of Asakusa, on the northern edge of the JR

Yamanote Line loop, Ueno is also part of the city's old downtown. Ueno boasts **Ueno Park**, a huge green space comprising a zoo, a concert hall, and several acclaimed museums, including the **Tokyo National Museum**, which houses the largest collection of Japanese art and antiquities in the world. Ueno Station serves as a stop for major train lines heading north and eastward, including some lines of the Shinkansen bullet train. Under the train tracks of the JR Yamanote Line loop is a thriving market for food, clothing, and accessories.

Shinjuku Originating as a post town in 1698 to serve the needs of feudal lords and their retainers traveling between Edo and the provinces, Shinjuku was hardly touched by the 1923 Great Kanto Earthquake, making it an attractive alternative for businesses wishing to relocate following the destruction. In 1971, Japan's first skyscraper was erected with the opening of the Keio Plaza Hotel in western Shinjuku, setting a dramatic precedent for things to come. Today more than a dozen skyscrapers, including several hotels, dot the Shinjuku skyline, and with the opening of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office (TMG) in 1991 (with a tourist office and a great observation floor), Shinjuku's transformation into the capital's upstart business district was complete. Eastern Shinjuku is known for its shopping, particularly the huge **Takashimaya Times Square** complex, and for its nightlife, especially in **Kabuki-cho**, a thriving amusement center, and in **Shinjuku 2-chome**, Tokyo's premier gay nightlife district. Separating eastern and western Shinjuku is **Shinjuku Station**, the nation's busiest commuter station and located on the

western end of the Yamanote Line loop. An oasis in the middle of Shinjuku madness is Shinjuku Gyoen Park, a beautiful garden for strolling.

Ikebukuro Located north of Shinjuku on the Yamanote Line loop, Ikebukuro is the working person's Tokyo, less refined and a bit rougher around the edges. Ikebukuro is where you'll find **Seibu** and **Tobu**, two of the country's largest department stores, as well as the **Japan Traditional Craft Center** with its beautifully crafted traditional items. The **Sunshine City Building**, one of Tokyo's tallest skyscrapers, is home to a huge indoor shopping center.

Harajuku The mecca of Tokyo's younger generation, Harajuku swarms throughout the week with teenagers in search of fashion and fun. At its center is **Omotesando Dori**, a fashionable tree-lined avenue flanked by trendy shops, sidewalk cafes, and restaurants. Nearby is **Takeshita Dori**, a narrow pedestrian lane packed with young people looking for the latest in inexpensive clothing and cosmetics. Harajuku is also the home of one of Japan's major attractions, **Meiji Jingu Shrine**, built in 1920 to deify Emperor and Empress Meiji. Another drawing card is the **Oriental Bazaar**, a great shop specializing in products and souvenirs of Japan.

Aoyama While Harajuku is for teenyboppers, Aoyama is a yuppie-fied playground and shopping mecca for Tokyo's trendsetters, chic and upscale, and boasting more designer fashion outlets than anywhere else in the city. Located on the eastern end of Omotesando Dori (and an easy walk from Harajuku), Aoyama boasts a number of fine shops and a great array of tempting restaurants.

Shibuya Located on the southwestern edge of the Yamanote Line loop, Shibuya serves as a vibrant nightlife and shopping area for the young. More subdued than Shinjuku, more down-to-earth than Harajuku, and less cosmopolitan than Roppongi, it's home to more than a dozen department stores specializing in everything from designer clothing to housewares and CDs. Don't miss the light change at Shibuya Crossing, reportedly Japan's busiest intersection, with its hordes of pedestrians, neon, and five video billboards that have earned it the nickname "Times Square of Tokyo."

Ebisu One station south of Shibuya on the JR Yamanote Line, Ebisu was a minor player in Tokyo's shopping and nightlife league until the 1995 debut of **Yebisu Garden Place**, a smart-looking complex of apartments, concert halls, two museums, restaurants, a department store, and a first-class hotel, all connected to Ebisu Station via moving walkway. The vicinity east of Ebisu Station, once a sleepy residential and low-key shopping district, has recently blossomed into a small but thriving nightlife mecca popular with expats who find Roppongi too crass or commercial.

Roppongi Tokyo's best-known nightlife district for young Japanese and foreigners, Roppongi has more bars and nightclubs than any other district outside Shinjuku, as well as a multitude of restaurants serving international cuisines. The newest kid on the block, however, is the eye-popping, 11-hectare (28-acre) **Roppongi Hills**, Tokyo's largest urban development housing 210 shops and restaurants, a first-class hotel, a garden, apartments, offices, a cinema complex, and an art museum.

Akasaka With its several large hotels and small nightlife district, Akasaka caters mostly to businessmen but is otherwise of little interest to tourists. It does, however, boast some good restaurants; in recent years, so many Korean restaurants and establishments have set up shop here that it could be nicknamed "Little Korea."

Shinagawa Once an important post station on the old Tokaido Highway, Shinagawa remains an important crossroads due to **Shinagawa Station**, a stop on the Shinkansen bullet train route and on the southern end of the Yamanote Line loop. Home to several major hotels, it has also witnessed a major blossoming of office construction in recent years, making it a serious rival to Shinjuku's business district.

Odaiba This is Tokyo's newest district, quite literally—it was constructed from reclaimed land in Tokyo Bay. Connected to the mainland by the **Rainbow Bridge** (famous for its chameleon colors after nightfall), the Yurikamome Line monorail, the JR Saikyo Line, the Rinkai Line, and a vehicular harbor tunnel, Odaiba is home to a few hotels, Japan's largest convention space, several shopping complexes (including the fancy Venus Fort and the interesting Tokyo Decks with its "Little Hong Kong" and "post-war Japan" themes), the **Museum of Maritime Science**, the **National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation**, a hot-spring public bath that harkens back to the Edo era, a monolithic Ferris wheel, and **Megaweb**, a huge multimedia car amusement and exhibition center sponsored by Toyota. For young Japanese, it's one of Tokyo's hottest date spots.

2 Getting Around

The first rule of getting around Tokyo: It will always take longer than you think. For short-term visitors, calculating travel times in Tokyo is a tricky business. Taking a taxi is expensive and involves the probability of getting stuck interminably in traffic, with the meter ticking away. Taking the subway is usually more efficient, even though it's more complicated and harder on your feet: Choosing which route to take isn't always clear, and transfers between lines are sometimes quite a hike in themselves. If I'm going from one end of Tokyo to the other by subway, I usually allow anywhere from 30 to 60 minutes, depending on the number of transfers and the walking distance to my final destination. If you don't have to change trains, you can travel from one end of Tokyo to the other in about 30 minutes or less. In any case, travel times to destinations within each line are posted on platform pillars.

Your best bet for getting around Tokyo is to take the subway or Japan Railways (JR) commuter train such as the Yamanote Line to the station nearest your destination. From there you can either walk, using a map and asking directions along the way, or take a taxi.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

If you think you'll be using a combination of public transportation systems in 1 day—subway, JR train, and Toei bus (except double-decker buses)—consider purchasing a **Tokyo Free Kippu**, which, despite its name, costs ¥1,580 (\$13) but does allow unlimited travel for 1 day. It's available at all JR stations, JR View Plazas, and most subway stations.

BY SUBWAY & JR TRAIN

BY SUBWAY To get around Tokyo on your own, it's imperative to learn how to ride its subways. Fortunately, Tokyo's subway system is efficient, modern, clean, and easy to use, and all station names are written in English. Some cars also post the name of the next station in English on digital signs above their doors or even announce stops in English. Altogether, 13 subway lines crisscross underneath the city, and each line is color-coded. The Ginza Line, for example, is orange, which means all its coaches and signs are orange. If you're transferring to the Ginza Line from another line, just follow the orange signs and circles to the Ginza Line platform. Before boarding, however, make sure the train is going in the right direction; otherwise you'll end up at the opposite end of the city. Tokyo's newest line, the Oedo Line, makes a zigzag loop around the city and is useful for traveling between Roppongi and Shinjuku (be aware, however, that it's buried deep underground and that stations take a while to reach, despite escalators).

Tickets Vending machines at all subway stations sell tickets; fares begin at ¥160 (\$1.35) for the shortest distance and increase according to how far you're traveling, with ¥300 (\$2.50) charged for the longest distance. Children under 6 ride free; children 6 to 11 pay half-fare. Vending machines give change, and most accept ¥1,000, ¥5,000, and ¥10,000 notes. **To purchase your ticket**, insert money into the vending machine until the fare buttons light up, then push the amount for the ticket you want. Your ticket and change will drop onto a little platform at the bottom of the machine.

Fares are posted on a large subway map above the vending machines, but they're generally in Japanese only; major stations also post a smaller map listing fares in English, but you may have to search for it. An alternative is to look at

your Tourist Information Center subway map—it lists stations in both Japanese and English. Once you know what the Japanese characters look like, you may be able to locate your station and the corresponding fare. If you still don't know the fare, just buy a basic-fare ticket for ¥160 (\$1.35) and insert it into the automatic entrance gate. When you exit at your destination, look for the **fare adjustment machine**; insert your ticket to find out how much more you owe, or look for a **fare adjustment window** where a subway employee will tell you how much extra you owe.

In any case, be sure to hang onto your ticket, since you must give it up at the end of your journey.

Hours Most subways run from about 5am to midnight, although the times of the first and last trains depend on the line, the station, and whether it's a weekday or weekend. Schedules are posted in the stations, and throughout most of the day, trains run every 3 to 5 minutes.

Avoid taking the subway during the weekday morning **rush hour**, from 8 to 9am—the stories you've heard about commuters packed into trains like sardines are all true. There are even “platform pushers,” men who push people into compartments so that the doors can close. If you want to witness Tokyo at its craziest, go to Shinjuku Station at 8:30am—but go by taxi unless you want to experience the crowding firsthand.

Exiting the Subway Once you reach your destination, look for the yellow signs on station platforms designating which exit to take for major buildings, museums, and addresses. If you're confused about which exit to take from the station, ask someone at the window near the ticket gate. Taking the right exit can make a world of difference, especially in Shinjuku, where there are more than 60 station exits.

Value Saving on Transportation

If you think you'll be using Tokyo's subway system a lot or simply wish to avoid having to purchase an individual ticket for each ride, I strongly urge you to invest in an **Passnet Metro Card** (also called Passnet T-Card), a prepaid card sold at station vending machines for ¥1,000 (\$8.35), ¥3,000 (\$25), and ¥5,000 (\$42) worth of rides. Insert the card into the automatic ticket gates when you enter and exit the subway wickets; the charge for the ride will be deducted automatically from your card. You can also use your Metro Card in the vending machine to purchase regular single tickets. Since rides on the subway can really add up, you'll find the ¥1,000 Metro Card useful even if you're staying in Tokyo just 3 or 4 days. Alternatively, a **One-day Economy Pass (Echinichi Josha Ken)** for unlimited rides on all subway lines costs ¥1,000 (\$8.35). Although other types of tickets and passes are available, I find them too complicated for short-time visitors.

If you'll be using the JR lines frequently, consider purchasing an **IO Card**, a prepaid card that allows you to pass through automatic fare gates without having to purchase a separate JR ticket each time. IO cards come in values of ¥1,000 (\$8.35), ¥3,000 (\$25), and ¥5,000 (\$42). There's also a **JR One-Day Tokyo Rail Pass (Tokunai Free Kippu)**, which allows unlimited travel on JR trains for 1 day for ¥730 (\$6).

Tips Subway Information

For information on tickets, passes, and lines for the subway, stop by information desks located at Ginza, Shinjuku, and other major stations.

BY TRAIN In addition to subway lines, electric commuter trains operated by **Japan Railways (JR)** run aboveground throughout greater Tokyo. These are also color-coded, with fares beginning at ¥130 (\$1.10). Buy your ticket from vending machines just as you would for the subway.

The **Yamanote Line** (green-colored coaches) is the best-known and most convenient JR line. It makes an oblong loop around the city, stopping at 29 stations along the way. In fact, you may want to take the Yamanote Line and stay on it for a roundup view of Tokyo; the entire trip takes about an hour, passing stations like Shinjuku, Tokyo, Akihabara, Ueno, Harajuku, and Shibuya on the way.

Another convenient JR line is the orange-colored **Chuo Line**; it cuts across Tokyo between Shinjuku and Tokyo stations. The yellow-colored **Sobu Line** runs between Shinjuku and Akihabara and beyond to Chiba. Other JR lines serve outlying districts for the metropolis's commuting public. Since the Yamanote, Chuo, and Sobu lines are rarely identified by their specific names at major stations, look for signs that say JR LINES.

For more information on JR lines and tickets, stop by one of JR's **Information Centers** at Tokyo Station (central passage; open daily 9am–7pm) and Shinjuku Station (the east side; open daily 10am–6:30pm). You can also call the JR's English-language telephone service at ☎ **03/3423-0111**, available Monday through Friday from 10am to 6pm.

A NOTE ON TRANSFERS You can transfer between most subway lines without buying another ticket, and you can transfer between JR train lines on one ticket. However, your ticket or prepaid card does not allow a transfer between subway lines, JR train lines, and private train lines connecting Tokyo with outlying destinations such as Nikko. You usually don't have to worry about this, though, because if you exit through a wicket that keeps your ticket, you'll know you have to buy another one. If the wicket sounds a buzzer, you know you have to pay more at the fare adjustment machine.

The general rule is that if your final destination and fare are posted above the ticket vending machines, you can travel all the way to your destination with only one ticket. But don't worry about this too much—the ticket collector will set you straight if you've miscalculated. **Note:** If you pay too much for your ticket, the portion of the fare that's left unused is not refundable—so, again, the easiest thing to do if in doubt is to buy the cheapest fare.

BY BUS

Buses are difficult to use in Tokyo because destinations are sometimes written in Japanese only and most bus drivers don't speak English. However, they are sometimes convenient for short distances. If you're feeling adventurous, board the bus at the front and drop the exact fare into the box by the driver. If you don't have the exact fare (usually ¥200/\$1.65), a slot located next to the fare box will accept coins only; your change will come out below, minus the fare. Another slot accepts ¥1,000 bills only; the change, minus the fare, comes out in the same place as if you inserted a coin. A signboard at the front of the bus displays the

next stop. When you wish to get off, press one of the buttons on the railing near the door or the seats.

BY TAXI

Taxis are shamefully expensive in Tokyo. **Fares** start at ¥660 (\$5.50) for the first 2km (1¼ miles) and increase ¥80 (65¢) for each additional 274m (904 ft.) or 40 seconds of waiting time. There are also smaller, more compact taxis that start out slightly less at ¥640 (\$5.35) for the first 2km (1¼ miles) but then increase ¥80 (65¢) for each additional 290m (957 ft.). In 1997, when controls regulating taxi fares became less restrictive, some taxis began offering fares cheaper than the standard rates for short distances. Fares are posted on the back of the front passenger seat. If you're like me, however, you probably won't shop around—you'll just gratefully jump into the first taxi that stops. **Note:** From 11pm to 5am, an extra 30% is added to your fare.

With the exception of some major thoroughfares in the downtown area, you can **hail a taxi** from the street or go to a taxi stand or a major hotel. A red light will show above the dashboard if a taxi is free to pick up a passenger; a green light indicates the taxi is occupied. Be sure to stand clear of the back door—it swings open automatically. Likewise, it shuts automatically once you're in. Taxi drivers get upset if you try to manhandle it yourself.

Unless you're going to a well-known landmark or hotel, it's best to **have your destination written out in Japanese**, since most taxi drivers don't speak English. But even that may not help. Tokyo is so complicated that even taxi drivers may not know a certain area, although they do have detailed maps. If a driver doesn't understand where you're going, he may refuse to take you. Otherwise, don't be surprised if he jumps out of the cab to ask for directions at a nearby shop—with the meter ticking.

There are so many taxis cruising Tokyo that one is always around and available—except when you need it most. That is, when it's raining and sometimes just after 1am on weekends, after all subways and trains have stopped. However, one valuable result of the recession is the number of available taxis now cruising late at night; now that companies no longer pay for employees' expensive after-the-last-train taxi fares, nighttime revelers no longer have to stay out until 3am just to find a taxi.

One of these major taxi companies can be called for a pick-up: **Nihon Kotsu** (☎ 03/3586-2151), **Kokusai** (☎ 03/3491-6001), **Daiwa** (☎ 03/3563-5151), or **Hinomaru** (☎ 03/3814-1111). Note, however, that only Japanese is spoken, and you'll be required to pay extra (usually not more than ¥500/\$4.35). I have rarely telephoned for a taxi—just like in the movies, a taxi usually cruises by just when you raise your hand.

FAST FACTS: Tokyo

If you can't find answers to your questions here, check "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2. If you still can't find an answer, call the **Tourist Information Center** (☎ 03/3201-3331) Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to noon, or the city-run **Tokyo Tourist Information Center** (☎ 03/5321-3077), open daily 10am to 6:30pm. If you're staying in a first-class hotel, another valuable resource is the concierge or guest-relations desk; the staff there can tell you how to reach your destination,

can answer general questions, and will even make restaurant reservations for you.

American Express There is no public American Express office in Japan.

Area Code If you're calling a Tokyo number from outside Tokyo but within Japan, the area code for Tokyo is **03**. For details on calling Tokyo from outside Japan, see "Telephones," in "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2.

Babysitters Most major hotels can arrange babysitting services, but expect to pay about \$42 for 2 hours. A very few also provide in-house day-care centers. **Tokyo Domestic Service** (☎ 03/3584-4769) can provide bilingual sitters. There's a 3-hour minimum charge of ¥5,500 (\$46), then ¥1,500 (\$12) per hour after that. Parents are also required to pay transportation (¥1,000/\$8.35 during the day, ¥1,500/\$12 9–11pm, and ¥3,000/\$25 after 11pm) and to provide meals.

Business Hours Government offices and private companies are generally open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm. Banks are open Monday through Friday 9am to 3pm, while neighborhood post offices are open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm. Some major post offices (located in each ward) are open Monday through Friday from 9am to 7pm.

Department stores are open from about 10am to 7:30 or 8pm. Some are open every day, while others have irregular closing days one to four times a month (but always the same day of the week). Smaller stores are generally open from about 10am to 8pm, closed 1 day a week. Convenience stores such as 7-Eleven are open 24 hours.

Keep in mind that museums, gardens, and attractions stop selling admission tickets at least 30 minutes before the actual closing time. Similarly, restaurants take their last orders at least 30 minutes before the posted closing time (even earlier for kaiseki restaurants).

Currency Exchange You can exchange money in major banks throughout Tokyo, often indicated by a sign in English near the front door. Banks give a slightly better exchange rate for traveler's checks than for cash; *you'll need your passport to exchange traveler's checks*. If you need to exchange money outside banking hours, your best bet is your hotel or a large department store, though exchange rates won't be as favorable (note that you'll need your passport). At Narita Airport (which also has ATMs for major credit cards), exchange counters are open from 6am to 11pm.

Otherwise, the most convenient ATMs are located in post offices, available for Visa and MasterCard and for PLUS and Cirrus cards during regular post office hours. The ATM at the Central Post Office near Tokyo Station (see "Post Offices," below) is open Monday to Friday 7am to 11:55pm, Saturday 5am to 11:55pm, and Sunday and holidays from 5am to 8pm; note, however, that it did not accept my Visa debit card. You can also get cash advances by using your Visa credit card at any Sumitomo Bank and by using your MasterCard at Union Credit (UC) banks and some Sumitomo banks, Citibanks, Mitsubishi-Tokyo banks, and affiliated banks, with branches all over town; you'll have to show your passport for cash advances.

Dentists & Doctors Many first-class hotels offer medical facilities or an in-house doctor. Otherwise, your embassy can refer you to English-speaking doctors, specialists, and dentists. In addition, the **AMDA International**

Medical Information Center (☎ 03/5285-8088), available Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm, can provide information on English-speaking staff. The following are clinics with some English-speaking staff that are popular with foreigners living in Tokyo: **The International Clinic**, 1-5-9 Azabudai, Minato-ku, within walking distance of Roppongi or Azabu Juban stations (☎ 03/3582-2646; open Mon-Fri 9am-noon and 2-5pm, Sat 9am-noon; walk-ins only); the **Ishikawa Clinic**, Azabu Sakurada Heights, Room 201, 3-2-7 Nishi Azabu, Minato-ku, near Roppongi Station (☎ 03/3401-6340; open Mon-Fri 9am-12:30pm, as well as Mon 3:15-4:30pm and Tues and Thurs 3:15-6:30pm; appointments are preferred); **Tokyo Medical & Surgical Clinic**, 32 Mori Building, 3-4-30 Shiba-koen, Minato-ku, near Kamiyacho, Onarimon, or Shiba-koen stations and across from Tokyo Tower (☎ 03/3436-3028; open Mon-Fri 9am-1pm and 2-5pm, Sat 9am-noon; appointments only). At the Tokyo Medical & Surgical Clinic, above, is also the **Tokyo Clinic Dental Office** (☎ 03/3431-4225), open Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday from 9am to 6pm and Saturday 9am to 5pm. You can also make appointments to visit doctors at the hospitals listed below.

Drugstores There is no 24-hour drugstore in Tokyo, but ubiquitous 24-hour convenience stores such as 7-Eleven, Lawson, and FamilyMart carry things like aspirin. If you're looking for specific pharmaceuticals, a good bet is the **American Pharmacy**, in the basement of the Marunouchi Building, 2-4-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku (☎ 03/5220-7716; open Mon-Fri 9am-9pm, Sat 10am-9pm, and Sun and holidays 10am-8pm), which has many of the same over-the-counter drugs you can find at home (many of them imported from the United States) and can fill American prescriptions—but note that you *must first visit a doctor in Japan* before foreign prescriptions can be filled, so it's best to bring an ample supply of any prescription medication with you.

Embassies & Consulates See "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2.

Emergencies The national emergency numbers are ☎ 110 for police and ☎ 119 for ambulance and fire. You do not have to insert a coin or telephone card for an emergency number from a public phone, but you do have to push a red button before placing the call.

Hospitals In addition to going to these hospitals for an emergency, you can also make appointments at their clinics to see a doctor: **The International Catholic Hospital** (Seibo Byoin), 2-5-1 Naka-Ochiai, Shinjuku-ku, near Meiji Station on the Yamanote Line (☎ 03/3951-1111; clinic hours Mon-Sat 8-11am; closed 3rd Sat of each month; appointments required); **St. Luke's International Hospital** (Seiroka Byoin), 9-1 Akashi-cho, Chuo-ku, near Tsukiji Station on the Hibiya Line (☎ 03/3541-5151; Mon-Fri 8:30-11am; appointments necessary for some treatments); and the **Japan Red Cross Medical Center** (Nihon Sekijujisha Iryo Center), 4-1-22 Hiroo, Shibuya-ku (☎ 03/3400-1311; Mon-Fri 8:30-11am; walk-ins only), whose closest subway stations are Roppongi, Hiroo, and Shibuya—from there, you should take a taxi.

Hot Lines In addition to the Tourist Information Centers (see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter), the Tokyo Metropolitan Government maintains a **Foreign Residents' Advisory Center** (☎ 03/5320-7744)

that can answer questions on topics ranging from problems of daily life to Japanese customs and culture, Monday to Friday from 9:30am to noon and 1 to 4pm. The **Japan Helpline** (☎ 0120/46-1997) is a crisis hot line that can also answer questions about life in Japan. For criminal matters or concerns, the **Metropolitan Police Department** has a telephone counseling service for foreigners (☎ 03/3503-8484), available Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5pm.

Internet Access If your hotel doesn't provide Internet access, **Kinko's** has more than 25 locations throughout Tokyo, including one at Tokyo Station at the Yaesu North exit (☎ 03/3213-1811); one at 1-2-12 Yurakucho (☎ 03/5251-4808; new Hibiya Station and opposite the Imperial Hotel); and one in the Odakyu Southern Tower Building, 2-2-1 Yoyogi (☎ 03/3377-5711; near Shinjuku Station's south exit). Most Kinko's are open 24 hours and charge ¥200 (\$1.65) per 10 minutes of computer time. Cheaper are cybercafes. I like **Yahoo Café**, 5-11-2 Jingumae, above Starbucks, on a side street off Omotesando Dori behind Oriental Bazaar and Kiddy Land (☎ 03/3797-6821; station: Meiji-Jingumae or Harajuku). Its 31 computers are free, which means you might have to wait; open daily 8am to 10pm. Alternatively, there's **Internet Café Geragera**, 6-1-26 Roppongi (☎ 03/3796-7762; station: Roppongi), on the fifth floor above Almond Coffee Shop on Roppongi Crossing. Open 24 hours, it charges ¥100 (85¢) per 15 minutes.

Lost Property If you've forgotten something on a subway, in a taxi, or on a park bench, don't assume it's gone forever—if you're willing to trace it, you'll probably get it back. If you can remember where you last saw it, the first thing to do is telephone the establishment or return to where you left it; there's a good chance it will still be sitting there. If you've lost something on the street, go to the nearest police box (*koban*); items found in the neighborhood will stay there for 3 days or longer.

If you've lost something in a taxi, have someone who speaks Japanese contact the **Taxi Kindaika Center**, 7-3-3 Minamishima, Koto-ku (☎ 03/3648-0300). For JR trains, have someone who speaks Japanese call or go to the **Lost and Found Sections** at Tokyo JR Station (☎ 03/3231-1880) or at Ueno JR Station (☎ 03/3841-8069); or you can call the **JR East Infoline** at (☎ 03/3423-0111). If you've lost something on a Tokyo Metropolitan subway or bus, immediately contact the nearest station where you think you lost it. After 3 days, contact the lost and found section of the **Tokyo Metropolitan Government**, 2-40-8 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku (☎ 03/3812-2011).

Eventually, every unclaimed item in Tokyo ends up at the **Central Lost and Found Office of the Metropolitan Police Board**, 1-9-11 Koraku, Bunkyo-ku (☎ 03/3814-4151; Mon-Fri 8:30am-5:15pm; station: Iidabashi).

Luggage Storage/Lockers Coin-operated lockers are located at all major JR stations, such as Tokyo, Shinjuku, and Ueno, as well as at most subway stations. Lockers cost ¥300 to ¥700 (\$2.50-\$5.85), depending on the size.

Police The national emergency telephone number is ☎ 110. The Metropolitan Police Department also maintains a telephone counseling service for foreigners at ☎ 03/3503-8484 Monday through Friday from 8:30am to 5pm.

Post Offices If your hotel cannot mail letters for you, ask the concierge where the nearest post office is. The **Central Post Office**, just southwest of Tokyo Station at 2-7-2 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku (☎ 03/3284-9527), has longer business hours than most: Monday through Friday 9am to 9pm and Saturday, Sunday, and holidays 9am to 7pm. An after-hours counter remains open throughout the night for mail and packages, making this one of two 24-hour service facilities in town; the other is the Shibuya Central Post Office, 1-12-13 Shibuya (☎ 03/5469-9907; station: Shibuya).

For English-language postal information, call ☎ 03/5472-5851 Monday through Friday between 9:30am and 4:30pm. Also see "Mail," under "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2.

Restrooms If you're in need of a restroom in Tokyo, your best bets are train and subway stations, big hotels, department stores, and fast-food chains like McDonald's. For an explanation of using Japanese toilets, see "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2.

Safety Tokyo is one of the safest cities in the world. However, crime is on the increase, and there are precautions you should always take when traveling: Stay alert and be aware of your immediate surroundings. Be especially careful with cameras, purses, and wallets, particularly in crowded subways, department stores, or tourist attractions (such as the retail district around Tsukiji Fish Market), especially as pickpocketing has been on the rise. Some Japanese also caution women against walking through parks alone at night.

Taxes In addition to the national 5% consumption tax, Tokyo levies a hotel tax on rooms costing ¥10,000 (\$83) and up per person per night: ¥100 (85¢) is levied per person per night for rates between ¥10,000 (\$83) and ¥14,999 (\$125); rates of ¥15,000 (\$125) and up are taxed at ¥200 (\$1.65). See "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2.

Telephone & Fax For information on how to make calls, see "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2. For directory assistance in Tokyo, dial ☎ 104.

If you wish to rent a mobile phone during your stay in Tokyo and your hotel does not offer such services, contact **Mova Rental Center** (a division of NTT's DoCoMo mobile phone division), on the first floor of the Shin-Otemachi Building, near Tokyo Station, at 2-2-21 Otemachi (☎ 0120-68-0100; open Mon-Fri 10am-7pm and Sat 10am-5pm). They charge ¥10,500 (\$88) for a week's rental, plus ¥60 (50¢) per minute on domestic calls (international calls require an additional ¥4,000/\$33 fee). Or call **DoCoMo's Customer Service Center** at ☎ 0120-005-250). In addition, **Sony Finance International** (☎ 03/3475-8711) has commercial outlets at Narita Airport, Ueno Station, the New Otani Hotel, and Shinagawa Prince Hotel. It charges a base rate of ¥1,000 (\$8.35) per week, plus ¥1,000 (\$8.35) per day and ¥90 (75¢) per domestic call or ¥330 (\$2.75) for the ability to make both domestic and international calls.

There are several English telephone directories providing addresses and telephone numbers for many businesses, companies, shops, and restaurants in Tokyo. If your hotel does not have one on hand, they're available for purchase at the bookstores listed under "The Shopping Scene," in chapter 4.

3 Where to Stay

Tokyo has no old, grand hotels in the tradition of Hong Kong's Peninsula or Bangkok's Oriental; it has hardly any old hotels, period. But what the city's hotels may lack in quaintness or old grandeur is more than made up for by the excellent services for which the Japanese are legendary: cleanliness and efficiency. Be prepared, however, for small rooms. Space is at a premium in Tokyo, so with the exception of some of the upper-range hotels, rooms seem to come in only three sizes: minuscule, small, and barely adequate.

Unfortunately, Tokyo also doesn't have many first-class ryokan, or Japanese-style inns. I suggest, therefore, that you wait for your travels around the country to experience a first-rate ryokan. Otherwise, there are moderate and inexpensive Japanese-style inns in Tokyo. In fact, if you're traveling on a tight budget, a simple Japanese-style inn is often the cheapest way to go, though don't expect much in the way of service or amenities. In addition, most of the upper-bracket hotels (like the Miyako) offer at least a few Japanese-style rooms, with tatami mats, a Japanese bathtub (deeper and narrower than the Western version), and a futon. Although these rooms tend to be expensive, they're usually large enough for four people.

For more on available types of accommodations, see "Tips on Accommodations," in chapter 2.

PRICE CATEGORIES The recommended hotels which follow are arranged first according to price, then by location. After all, since attractions are spread throughout the city, and Tokyo's public transportation service is fast and efficient (I've provided nearest subway or train stations for each listing)—and since this is one of the most expensive hotel cities in the world—the overriding factor in selecting accommodations will likely be cost. I've divided Tokyo's hotels into price categories based upon two people per night, excluding tax and service charge: **Very Expensive** hotels charge ¥37,000 (\$308) and above, **Expensive** hotels charge ¥26,000 to ¥36,840 (\$216–\$307), **Moderate** hotels offer rooms from ¥14,100 to ¥25,800 (\$117–\$215), and **Inexpensive** accommodations offer rooms for ¥14,000 (\$116) and less. Unless otherwise indicated, each unit comes with a private bathroom.

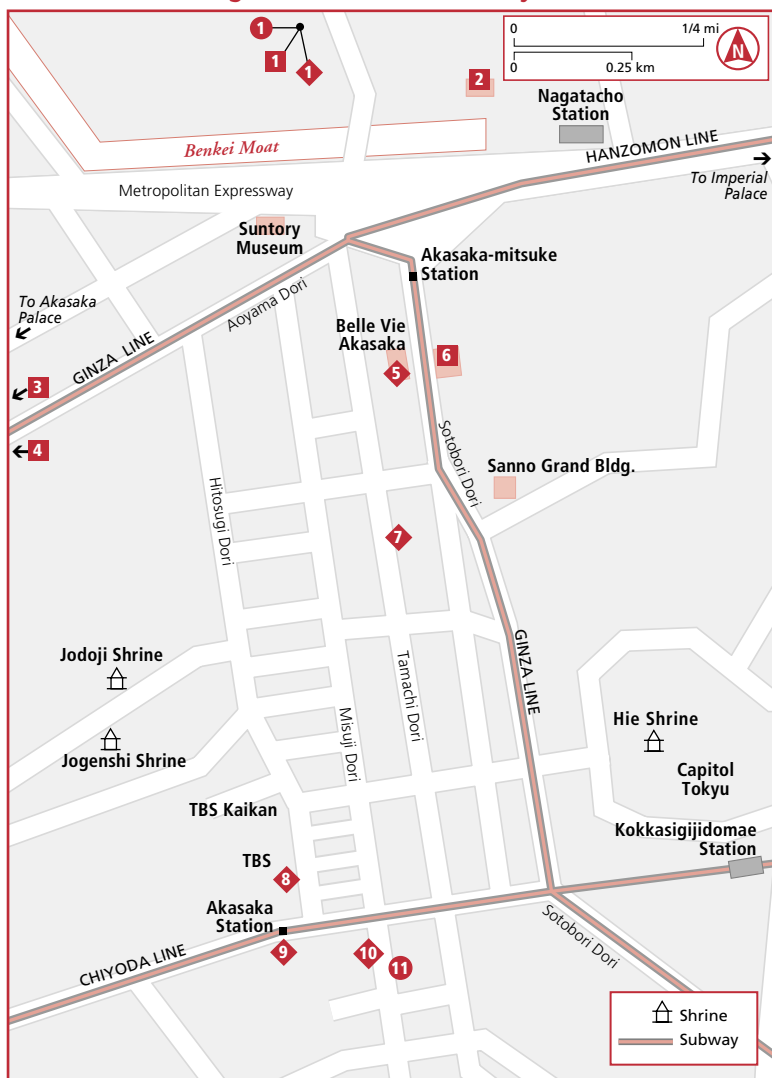
TAXES & SERVICE CHARGES In addition to quoted prices, upper-class hotels and most medium-range hotels will add a service charge of 10% to 15%. Furthermore, all hotels add a 5% tax. There's also a local hotel tax that applies only

Tips Mapping out Tokyo's Hotels

Once you've chosen a hotel or inn that appeals to you, you can locate it using the following neighborhood maps:

- To locate accommodations in **Akasaka**, p. 119.
 - To locate accommodations in **Ueno**, p. 127.
 - To locate accommodations in **Shinjuku**, p. 128.
 - To locate accommodations in **Asakusa**, p. 133.
 - To locate accommodations in **Hibiya** and **Ginza**, p. 144.
 - To locate accommodations in **Harajuku**, p. 159.
 - To locate accommodations in **Roppongi**, p. 165.
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Nightlife & Where to Stay & Dine in Akasaka



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

Akasaka Excel Hotel Tokyo **6**
 Akasaka Prince Hotel **2**
 Asia Center of Japan **3**
 Hotel New Otani **1**
 President Hotel **4**

DINING ◆

Blue Sky **1**
 daidaiya **5**
 Hayashi **10**
 La Tour d'Argent **1**
 Moti **7,9**
 Sekishin Tei **1**
 Zakuro **8**

NIGHTLIFE ●

Garden Lounge **1**
 Hobgoblin Tokyo **11**

Tips A Note on Prices

The prices quoted in this book were figured at ¥120 = US\$1. However, because of fluctuations in the exchange rate of the yen, the U.S. dollar equivalents given will probably vary during the lifetime of this edition. Be sure to check current exchange rates when planning your trip. In addition, the rates given below may increase, so be sure to ask the current rate when making your reservation.

to rooms that cost more than ¥10,000 (\$83) per person per night. ¥100 (85¢) is levied per person per night for rates between ¥10,000 and ¥14,999 (\$125); rates of ¥15,000 (\$125) and up are taxed at ¥200 (\$1.65). Unless otherwise stated, the prices given in this chapter do not include tax or service.

RESERVATIONS Although Tokyo doesn't suffer from a lack of hotel rooms during peak holidays (when most Japanese head for the hills and beaches), rooms may be in short supply at other times because of conventions and other events. If possible, avoid coming to Tokyo in mid-February unless you book well in advance—that's when university entrance exams bring aspiring high-school students and their parents flocking to the capital for a shot at one of the most prestigious universities in the country. And in summer, when most foreign tourists visit Japan, the cheaper accommodations are likely to fill up first.

It's always best, therefore, to make your hotel reservations in advance, especially if you're arriving in Japan after a long transoceanic flight and don't want the hassle of searching for a hotel room. If you arrive in Tokyo without reservations, stop by the **Tourist Information Center (TIC)**; see "Visitor Information," earlier in this chapter), where its Welcome Inn Reservation Center will book an inexpensive room free of charge.

VERY EXPENSIVE NEAR TOKYO STATION

Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi ★★☆☆ If it's your dream to stay in what may be Japan's most expensive hotel, this Four Seasons is for you, and with only 57 rooms, it offers the ultimate in service, privacy, and exclusivity. With a great location beside Tokyo Station (convenient to both the Shinkansen bullet train and Narita Airport) and within walking distance of the Ginza, it's buffered from the outside world with triple-glazed glass and a soothing, ultra-contemporary design that employs natural woods and color schemes of ecru and charcoal or off-white and black. Guests are escorted to rooms by guest-relations officers, and with good reason, as rooms are so high-tech it's almost impossible to figure out even such mundane tasks as double-locking the doors or engaging the bathtub stopper. At 44 sq. m (474 sq. ft.) and larger, the attractive rooms are among the largest in Tokyo, with such standouts as wall-mounted 42-inch plasma-screen TVs, leather-covered desks, bathrooms with separate tub and shower areas, and floor-to-ceiling windows. Unfortunately, the hotel's location on the lower levels of an office high-rise affords views only of Tokyo Station and its Shinkansen bullet trains or surrounding buildings, and at these prices, you have to wonder why there's no mini-TV in the bathroom. Still, this is a great place to stay—if you can get someone else to pay for it.

Pacific Century Place, 1-11-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-6277. ☎ 800/332-3442 in the U.S. or 03/5222-7222. Fax 03/5222-1255. www.fourseasons.com/marunouchi. 57 units. ¥55,000–¥65,000

(\$485–\$542) single; ¥60,000 – ¥70,000 (\$500–\$583) double or twin; from ¥85,000 (\$708) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Tokyo (2 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Modern French); bar; lounge; 24-hr. exercise room (free); public bath with imported hot-springs mineral water and steam room (free); spa; concierge; 24-hr. small business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; non-smoking rooms; complimentary shoeshine. *In room:* A/C, cable TV with CD/DVD players (free rentals), fax/printer/scanner/copier, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

SHINJUKU

Park Hyatt Tokyo ★★☆☆ Located in western Shinjuku on the 39th to 52nd floors of Kenzo Tange's granite-and-glass Shinjuku Park Tower, the Park Hyatt is among the most gorgeous and sophisticated hotels in Japan, a perfect reflection of high-tech, avant-garde Tokyo in the 21st century. If you can afford it, stay here. Check-in, on the 41st floor, is comfortably accomplished at one of three sit-down desks. In contrast to Shinjuku's other hotels, there's no off-the-street foot traffic here; rather, a hushed, soothing atmosphere prevails. Be sure to book early for the 52nd-floor New York Grill, one of Tokyo's best restaurants, which offers a spectacular setting (p. 155). All rooms average at least 45 sq. m (484 sq. ft.; the largest in Tokyo) and each has original artwork, a stunning and expansive view (including Mount Fuji on clear days), a bathroom to die for with a deep tub (plus separate shower) and a 15-inch plasma-screen TV, a walk-in closet, remote-control curtains, and even a Japanese/English dictionary. Despite the recent opening of Roppongi Hill's Grand Hyatt, this hotel isn't concerned about competition, as it considers itself in a higher class of its own.

3–7–1–2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 163-1055. ☎ 800/233-1234 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/5322-1234. Fax 03/5322-1288. www.parkhyatttokyo.com. 178 units. ¥52,000 – ¥63,000 (\$433–\$525) single or double; from ¥100,000 (\$833) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinjuku (a 13-min. walk, or 5-min. free shuttle ride); Hatsudai on the Keio Line (7 min.); Tochomae (8 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (French, contemporary Japanese, American); 2 bars; lounge; dramatic, 20m (66-ft.) indoor swimming pool with great views (free for hotel guests); health club and spa (fee: ¥4,000/\$33); concierge; free shuttle service to Shinjuku Station 1–3 times an hour; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; CD and book libraries; complimentary shoeshine. *In room:* A/C, 37-in. plasma-screen cable TV w/pay movies, CD/DVD players (w/free rentals), fax/printer, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

EBISU

Westin Tokyo ★★☆☆ *Value* A black marble floor, neoclassical columns and statuary, huge floral bouquets, and palm trees set this smart-looking hotel apart from other Tokyo hotels—in Hong Kong, it would fit right in. Opened in 1994 and set in the attractive Yebisu Garden Place (Tokyo's first planned community), it's still a hike from Ebisu Station, even with the aid of the elevated moving walkways. It's also far from Tokyo's business center. But the largely Japanese clientele favors it for its European ambience, relaxed atmosphere, the Westin name, nearby shops and restaurants, and reasonable rates compared to those of other deluxe hotels. The spacious, high-ceilinged rooms blend 19th-century Biedermeier styles with contemporary furnishings and boast Westin's trademark "Heavenly Beds" that are either king-size (in double rooms) or two double beds (in twins), oversize desks, separate lighted vanities, and large bathrooms with separate shower and tub areas. Guest Office rooms provide such additional features as a laser printer, fax machine, and office supplies. Rooms on higher floors cost more, with the best views of Tokyo Tower, though on clear days those facing west are treated to views of Mount Fuji.

1–4–1 Mita, Meguro-ku, Tokyo 153-8580. ☎ 800/WESTIN-1 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/5423-7000. Fax 03/5423-7600. www.westin.co.jp. 445 units. ¥34,000 – ¥44,000 (\$283–\$367) single; ¥39,000 – ¥49,000

(\$325–\$408) double or twin; from ¥105,000 (\$875) suite. Guest Office or Executive Club ¥51,000 (\$425) single, ¥56,000 (\$467) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Ebisu (7 min. via Yebisu Sky Walk). **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 3 bars and lounges; access to nearby health club with heated indoor pool and gym (fee: ¥4,000/\$33); concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/on-demand pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, iron, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

ROPPONGI & AKASAKA

Grand Hyatt Tokyo ★★☆☆ Opened in 2003 and counting on the surrounding Roppongi Hills development with its 200-some shops and restaurants to act as a major draw, this ambitious hotel wows with a wide range of recreational and dining facilities of its own, as well as technically advanced rooms older hotels can only dream about. In contrast to sister Park Hyatt's subdued, sophisticated atmosphere that attracts bigwigs hoping to escape the limelight, the Grand Hyatt strives for a livelier clientele who relish being in the center of things. Still, key cards inserted into elevators block public access to guest floors, and those seeking pampering can opt for the Grand Club floor. Rooms, at 42 sq. m (452 sq. ft.), are among Tokyo's largest. They feature Italian furnishings, large mahogany desks, the fastest high-speed Internet connection currently available (free of charge), blackout blinds, 30-inch flat-screen TVs, safes designed for laptops with plug-ins for recharging, 24-hour in-house technology concierge to correct guests' computer woes, and huge bathrooms that take up a fourth of the room space and come equipped with separate shower and tub areas and 13-inch flat-screen TVs.

6–10–3 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0032. ☎ 800/233-1234 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/4333-1234. Fax 03/4333-8123. www.tokyo.grand.hyatt.com. 389 units. ¥46,000 – ¥53,000 (\$383–\$442) single or double; Grand Club ¥54,000 (\$450); from ¥66,000 (\$550) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Roppongi (exit 1, 3 min.) or Azabu Juban (exit A3, 5 min.). **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; bar; 20m (66-ft.) indoor pool with Jacuzzi and saunas (fee: ¥4,000/\$33); fitness room (free); spa; concierge; business center; shopping arcade; salon; barbershop; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms; complimentary shoeshine. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/on-demand pay movies and CD/DVD player (free DVD rentals), high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

Hotel Okura ★★☆☆ Located across from the U.S. embassy and long considered one of Tokyo's most venerable hotels, the Okura is struggling to keep up with pricier—and newer—top-rated hotels in the city. Still, it remains a favorite home-away-from-home of visiting U.S. dignitaries, and service is dignified, gracious, and impeccable. Rich decor elegantly combines ikebana and shoji screens with an old-fashioned Western spaciousness. The atmosphere is low-key, almost Zen-like, with none of the flashiness inherent in some of the newer hotels. All rooms are comfortable, with clean, crisp furnishings of maple and chrome. My favorite rooms are in the main building facing the garden; some on the fifth floor here have balconies overlooking the garden and pool. Other rooms have views of a rooftop garden or Tokyo Tower. **Tip:** Although fees are charged for use of the health club and pools, hotel guests can use facilities free simply by becoming a member of Okura Club International—there's no charge for membership, which starts immediately after you fill out an application at the guest relations desk.

2–10–4 Toranomon, Minato-ku, Tokyo 105-0001. ☎ 800/223-6800 in the U.S. or 03/3582-0111. Fax 03/3582-3707. www.okura.com. 858 units. ¥29,000 – ¥42,000 (\$242–\$350) single; ¥37,500 – ¥57,000 (\$312–\$475) double; ¥40,000 – ¥57,000 (\$333–\$475) twin; from ¥79,000 (\$658) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Toranomon or Kamiyacho (5 min.). **Amenities:** 9 restaurants; 2 bars; nicely landscaped outdoor pool (fee: ¥2,000/\$17); health club (fee: ¥3,500/\$29 to use everything, ¥2,000/\$17 for indoor pool only); concierge; tour desk; free shuttle service to the nearest subway (weekends only); comprehensive business center; shopping arcade; salon; barbershop; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service;

nonsmoking rooms; tea-ceremony room; private museum showcasing Japanese art (free for hotel guests); pharmacy; in-house doctor and dentist; post office; packing and shipping service. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/on-demand pay movies which doubles as a computer with Internet access, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

NEAR IKEBUKURO

Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Chinzan-So ★★ ★ *Finds* Although inconveniently located in northwest Tokyo (about a 15-min. taxi ride from Ikebukuro), the Four Seasons, built in 1992, is a superb hotel set in the luscious 6.8-hectare (17-acre), 100-year-old Chinzan-So Garden, making it extremely inviting after a bustling day in Tokyo. It also has one of Tokyo's best health clubs and spas, including a gorgeous glass-enclosed indoor pool surrounded by greenery with a glass ceiling that opens in summer, indoor and outdoor Jacuzzis (the outdoor one overlooks a small Japanese garden), and a Japanese hot-springs bath (the water is shipped in from Izu Peninsula)—all free for hotel guests. The health club, with personal-size TVs at most workstations, even offers free continental breakfasts. In contrast to the starkly modern Four Seasons at Marunouchi, the luxurious interiors here make this one of the most beautiful European-style hotels in Japan. Since the hotel embraces the park, most rooms have peaceful garden views from their V-shaped bay windows. Even the smallest rooms, which occupy the lower floors, boast king-size beds and are twice the size of most Japanese hotel rooms. Bathrooms have mini-TVs and separate shower and tub areas. Don't miss a stroll through the garden.

2–10–8 Sekiguchi, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 112-8667. ☎ 800/332-3442 in the U.S., 800/268-6282 in Canada, or 03/3943-2222. Fax 03/3943-2300. www.fourseasons-tokyo.com. 283 units. ¥43,000 – ¥50,000 (\$358–\$417) single; ¥48,000 – ¥55,000 (\$400–\$458) double or twin; from ¥68,000 (\$567) suite. Club Floor Room ¥48,000 – ¥55,000 (\$400–\$458) single, ¥55,000 – ¥62,000 (\$458–\$517) twin or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Edogawabashi (exit 1a, a 10-min. walk or a 2-min. ride). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Italian, Chinese, Japanese,

Family-Friendly Hotels

Hotel New Otani (p. 126) This huge hotel has both indoor and outdoor swimming pools, but best for parents is the babysitting room for children ages 1 month to 5 years. For a small fortune, you can even leave the darlings overnight.

Imperial Hotel (p. 124) Although oriented toward business travelers, this famous hotel makes it easier to bring the family along with its day-care center for children ages 2 weeks to 6 years, its babysitting service, and its indoor pool.

National Children's Castle Hotel (p. 139) This is the absolutely best place to stay with kids, since the same building contains Tokyo's best indoor/outdoor playground and activity rooms for kids of all ages, offering everything from building blocks to computer games.

Sakura Ryokan (p. 137) This modern Japanese-style inn offers a large family room that sleeps up to eight people in traditional Japanese style, on futons laid out on tatami mats.

Shinagawa Prince Hotel (p. 135) Japan's largest hotel boasts a children's day-care center, an IMAX theater, an amusement arcade, indoor and outdoor pools, and more.

French); bar; lounge; indoor pool and health club (free for hotel guests); concierge; business center; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms; complimentary shoeshine. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/on-demand pay movies, CD player, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

EXPENSIVE

GINZA & HIBIYA

Imperial Hotel ★★ *Kids* Located across from Hibiya Park, within walking distance of the Ginza and Imperial Palace, this is one of Tokyo's best-known hotels, with foreigners (mostly business executives) making up about 40% of the guests. Although the Imperial's history goes back to 1890 and it was rebuilt in 1922 by Frank Lloyd Wright, the present hotel dates from 1970, with a 31-story tower added in 1983. (Part of Wright's original structure survives at Meiji-Mura, an architectural museum outside Nagoya.) Unfortunately, Wright's legacy lives on only in the hotel's Art Deco Old Imperial Bar. On the plus side, the Imperial is one of the few hotels with a children's day-care center. Rooms in the main building are quite large for Tokyo, while Tower rooms, slightly smaller but pricier, are higher up, have floor-to-ceiling bay windows, and offer fantastic views of either Imperial Palace grounds or, my preference, the Ginza and Tokyo Bay. All rooms come with the amenities you'd expect from a first-class hotel, as well as such appreciated extras as a hands-free phone, bedside controls for the curtains, and free high-speed Internet access, with a private e-mail address for each guest. **Tip:** Become a member of the Imperial Club (membership is free), and you can use the small pool and gym free of charge.

1-1-1 Uchisaiwaicho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-8558. ☎ **800/223-6800** in the U.S. and Canada or 03/3504-1111. Fax 03/3581-9146. www.imperialhotel.co.jp. 1,059 units. ¥30,000 – ¥56,000 (\$250–\$467) single; ¥35,000 – ¥61,000 (\$292–\$508) double or twin; from ¥110,000 (\$917) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Hibiya (1 min.). **Amenities:** 13 restaurants; 4 bars; 20th-floor indoor pool (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35; free for Imperial Club members), fitness room (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35; free for Imperial Club members), sauna; day-care center for children ages 2 weeks–6 years (fee: ¥5,000/\$42 for 2 hr.); concierge; limousine and car-rental services; extensively equipped business center; impressive shopping arcade; salon; barbershop; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; in-house doctor and dentist; tea-ceremony room; post office. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, fax, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, large safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

Renaissance Tokyo Hotel Ginza Tobu ★ This small, classy, and personable hotel, located on Showa Dori behind the Ginza Matsuzakaya department store and within easy walking distance of shopping and the Kabuki theater, attracts a clientele of which 60% is foreign, due mainly to its association with Marriott. Primarily a business hotel (a whopping 90% of its guests are business travelers), it has limited facilities; you're clearly paying for location here. Interestingly, the cheapest singles (which have single-size beds) are not offered to foreigners—they're considered too small—but if you insist, they'll let you have one (contact the hotel directly). Though indeed small, I personally find them more nicely appointed than those offered by most business hotels. Be sure to pick up the hotel's own sightseeing leaflets from the concierge, with advice on what to see and how to get there.

6-14-10 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0061. ☎ **888/236-2427** in the U.S. and Canada or 03/3546-0111. Fax 03/3546-8990. www.marriott.com/tyorn. 206 units. ¥17,000 – ¥23,000 (\$142–\$192) single; ¥28,000 (\$233) double or twin. Renaissance floor ¥24,000 – ¥30,000 (\$200–\$250) single, ¥35,000 (\$292) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Ginza (5 min.) or Higashi-Ginza (1 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, coffee shop); bar; concierge; 24-hr. business center; salon; room service (6:30am–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/on-demand pay videos, fax, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

UENO

Hotel Sofitel ★★ ★ *Finds* Located across from Shinobazu Pond in the heart of Ueno, this French-owned hotel is easily recognizable by its unique architecture: five pyramid-shaped trapeziums, stacked on top of each other. Inside, it's an oasis of refined beauty, excellent service, and great views. And with only a handful of rooms on each floor, it has the atmosphere of an intimate, luxury boutique hotel. Its restaurant, Provence, with a French chef, draws rave reviews. Chic rooms, with rates based on size, boast inlaid wood furniture, original artwork, and TVs that double as computers for Internet access (but no e-mail capabilities); but nothing beats the view over Shinobazu Pond with its bird refuge and the adjoining zoo (some rooms facing the opposite side have occasional views of Mount Fuji). I'm partial to the superior rooms on the 25th floor. Easy accessibility to Ueno Park and its museums make this unique hotel a natural for joggers and art lovers alike.

2-1-48 Ikenohata, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0008. ☎ 800/221-4542 in the U.S. and Canada, or 03/5685-7111. Fax 03/5685-6171. www.sofiteltokyo.com. 83 units. ¥24,000–¥29,000 (\$200–\$242) single; ¥30,000–¥35,000 (\$250–\$292) double or twin; from ¥50,000 (\$417) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Yushima (7 min.), Ueno (10 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); bar; lounge; exercise room (free); 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies and Internet access, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

SHINJUKU

Century Hyatt Tokyo ★★ ★ Located on Shinjuku's west side next to Shinjuku Central Park (popular with joggers), this 28-story hotel features an impressive seven-story atrium lobby with three of the most massive chandeliers you're likely to see anywhere. Many foreigners (mostly American) pass through the hotel's doors, ably assisted by the excellent staff with the usual high Hyatt standards. Rates are based on size; even the cheapest units are adequate, but they do face another building and don't let in much sunshine. If you can afford it, spring for a more expensive room on a high floor with bay windows overlooking the park (in winter, you might also have a view of Mount Fuji). Only a quarter of the rooms cater to business travelers with fax machines, high-speed Internet connections, and a two-line, hands-free speakerphone, a reflection of the fact that the hotel attracts leisure travelers as well, including tour groups.

2-7-2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0023. ☎ 800/233-1234 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/3349-0111. Fax 03/3344-5575. www.centuryhyatt.co.jp. 766 units. ¥23,000–¥32,000 (\$192–\$267) single; ¥32,000–¥34,000 (\$267–\$283) double or twin. Regency Club, from ¥36,000 (\$300) single or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Tocho-mae (1 min.), Nishi-Shinjuku (3 min.), or Shinjuku (a 10-min. walk, or a free 3-min. shuttle ride). **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; bar; lounge; health club with indoor pool (fee: ¥1,500/\$13); concierge; tour desk; free shuttle service to Shinjuku Station every 20 min.; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Hilton Tokyo ★★ ★ Located on Shinjuku's west side, the 38-story Tokyo Hilton with its sensually curving facade opened in 1984 as the largest Hilton in the Asia/Pacific area. Today it keeps a lower profile than most of the other Shinjuku hotels, with a quiet, subdued lobby, and it remains popular with business and leisure travelers alike. Rooms are up-to-date and adequate in size, and as with all Hiltons, the room decor here reflects traditional native style, with shoji screens instead of curtains and simple yet elegant furnishings that include queen-size beds or larger in all rooms. Deluxe-floor rooms come with the extras of free high-speed Internet access, fax, and safe.

6-6-2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0023. ☎ 800/HILTONS in the U.S. or Canada or 03/3344-5111. Fax 03/3342-6094. www.hilton.com. 806 units. ¥29,000–¥40,000 (\$242–\$333) single; ¥35,000–¥46,000 (\$292–\$383) twin or double. Executive floor ¥36,000–¥44,000 (\$300–\$367) single, ¥42,000–¥50,000 (\$350–\$417) twin or double, from ¥70,000 (\$583) suite. Children stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Nishi-Shinjuku (2 min.), Tochomae (3 min.), or Shinjuku (10-min walk or free shuttle bus). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; bar; lounge; 2 outdoor tennis courts; health club with indoor pool (fee: ¥1,500/\$12 for either pool or gym alone, ¥2,500/\$21 for sauna, ¥2,000/\$17 for pool and gym, ¥4,000/\$33 for everything); concierge; tour desk; complimentary shuttle service to Shinjuku Station 3–6 times an hour; Kinko's (open 24 hr.); small shopping arcade; convenience store; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

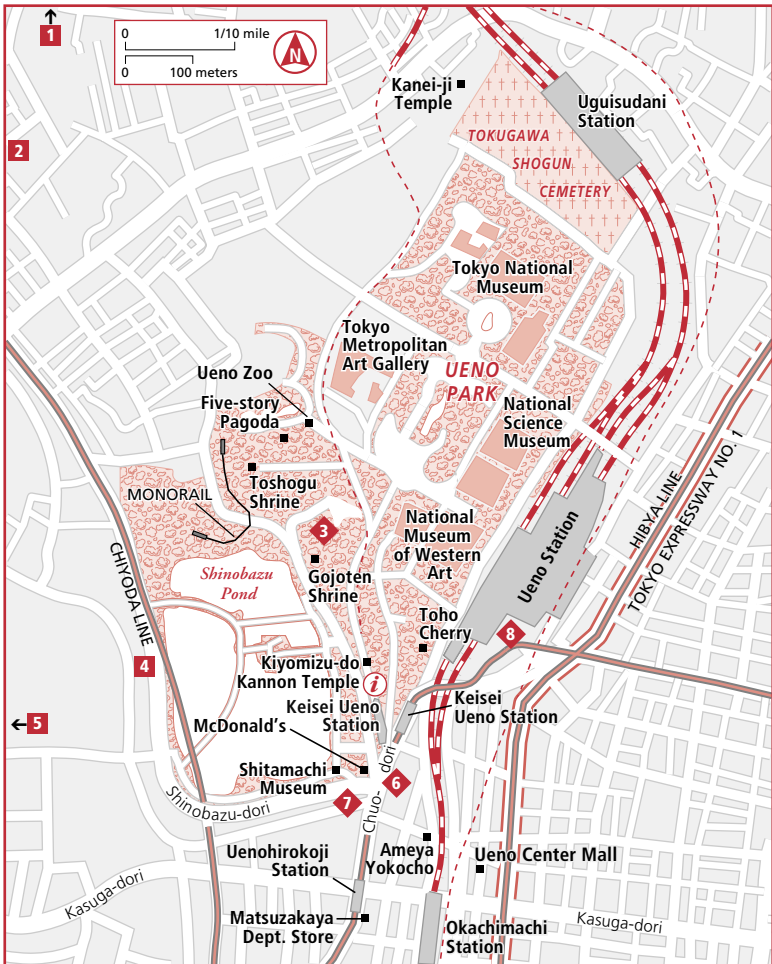
AKASAKA

Akasaka Prince Hotel ★★ This 40-story white skyscraper—an Akasaka landmark with a facade that reminds me of an unfolding fan—caused quite a stir when it opened in 1983, with some Tokyoites complaining that it was too cold and sterile. I think the Prince, designed by Kenzo Tange, was simply ahead of its time, with a blindingly white marble lobby intentionally spacious and empty, so as not to compete with brilliant Japanese kimono (weddings are big business in Japanese hotels). It set the pace for a flurry of hotels that followed, though marble is out while wood, stone, and hues of brown are today's hotel-fashion statement. Never out of fashion is the hotel's signature restaurant, Le Trianon, housed in a stately 80-year-old mansion that once belonged to the imperial family. Average-size guest rooms are set at a 45-degree angle from the center axis of the building's core, giving each one a corner view with expansive windows overlooking the city and letting in lots of sunshine; request one overlooking the Akasaka side, and you'll have a view of neon lights down below and Tokyo Tower in the distance.

1-2 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8585. ☎ 800/542-8686 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/3234-1111. Fax 03/3262-5163. www.princehotels.co.jp/english. 761 units. ¥25,000–¥37,000 (\$208–\$308) single; ¥33,000–¥42,000 (\$275–\$350) twin; ¥37,000–¥45,000 (\$308–\$375) double; from ¥90,000 (\$667) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Akasaka-mitsuke or Nagatacho (2 min.). **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 2 bars; 2 lounges; outdoor heated pool May–Sept (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35); small exercise room (fee: ¥500/\$4.15); concierge; tour desk; excellent business center with spectacular 20th-floor view; convenience store; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, small safe, washlet toilet.

Hotel New Otani ★★ *Kids* If you like small, quiet hotels, this monolith is not for you. Like a city unto itself, the New Otani is so big that two information desks are needed to assist lost souls searching for a particular restaurant or shop in the meandering arcade; there are even two check-in desks. The hotel's most splendid feature is its garden, the best of any Tokyo hotel—a 400-year-old Japanese garden that once belonged to a feudal lord, with 4 hectares (10 acres) of ponds, waterfalls, bridges, bamboo groves, and manicured bushes. The outdoor pool, flanked by greenery, is also nice. A variety of rooms, in a main building and a newer tower, are available. Those in the main building are comfortable, with shoji-like screens on the windows; more expensive rooms have such extras as bathroom scales, walk-in closets, and fax machines (otherwise, fax machines are available free of charge). Tower rooms range from chic ones done in jade, black, and chrome to “fusui healing” rooms with such extras as in-room humidifier, foot bath, and compact CD player. The tower offers the best views—of the garden, the skyscrapers of Shinjuku, and, on clear days, Mount Fuji in the distance. Since rates are the same no matter which way you face, be

Where to Stay & Dine in Ueno



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Annex Katsutaro 1
- Homeikan 5
- Hotel Sofitel 4
- Ryokan Sawanoya 2

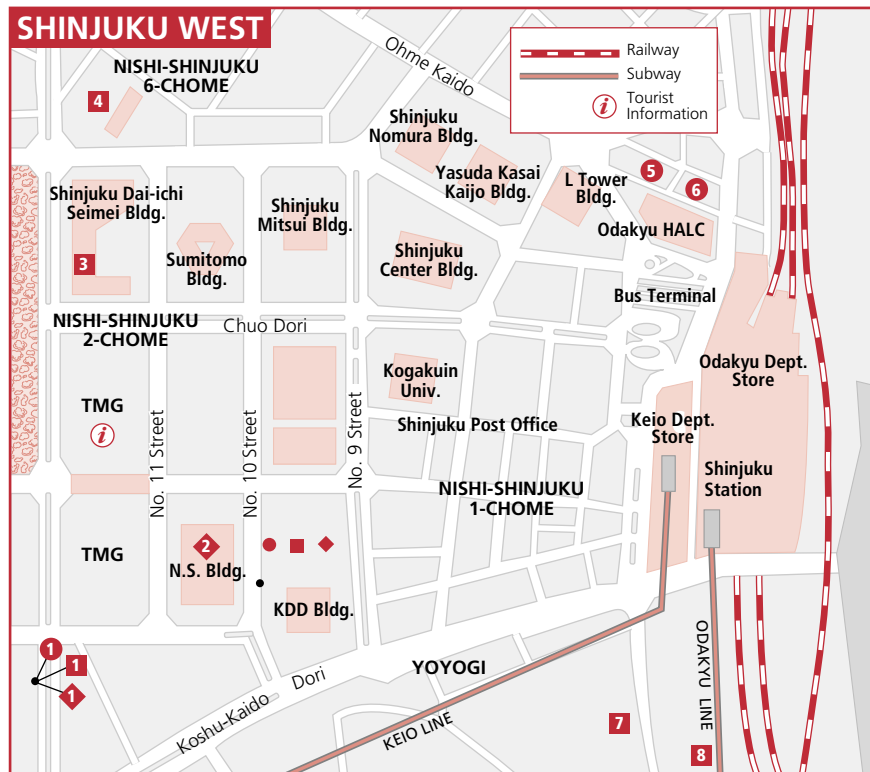
DINING ◆

- Hard Rock Cafe 8
- Izu'ei 7
- Maharaja 6
- Ueno Seiyoken Grill 3

- Railway
- Railway (tunnel)
- Subway
- Tourist Information

Nightlife & Where to Stay & Dine in Shinjuku

SHINJUKU WEST

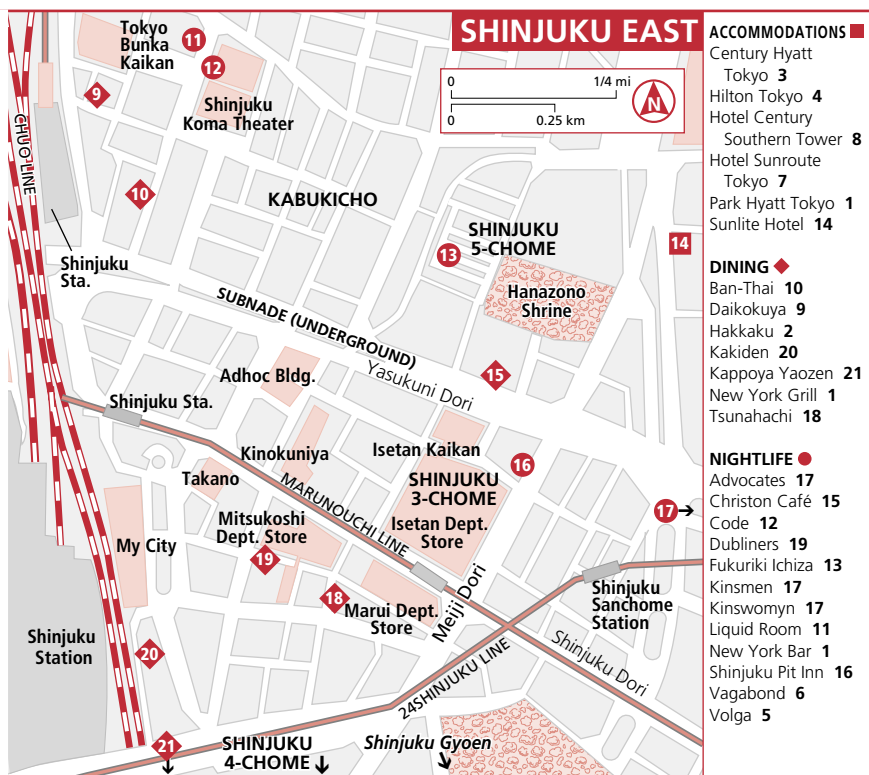


sure to request a room overlooking the garden. Parents appreciate the 24-hour Baby Room and the fact that the pool is free for those who become (for free) Hotel Club members.

4-1 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 102-8578. ☎ 800/421-8795 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/3265-1111. Fax 03/3221-2619. www.newotani.co.jp/en. 1,600 units. ¥29,000–¥36,000 (\$242–\$300) single; ¥34,000–¥57,000 (\$283–\$475) double; ¥41,000–¥57,000 (\$342–\$475) twin; from ¥80,000 (\$667) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Akasaka-mitsuke or Nagatacho (3 min.). **Amenities:** 28 restaurants; 5 bars and lounges; outdoor pool (fee: ¥2,000/\$17; free if you become a New Otani Hotel Club member at no extra charge); small exercise room (free for hotel guests); health club with lighted outdoor tennis courts (fee: ¥5,000/\$42); day-care center for children 1 month–5 years old (fee: ¥6,000/\$50 for 2 hr.); concierge; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade with 120 stores; convenience store; salon; room service (6am–1am); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; medical and dental clinics; post office; tea-ceremony room; chapel with daily services; art museum (free for hotel guests). **In room:** A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

NEAR SHINAGAWA

Miyako Hotel Tokyo ★ *Value* A Radisson affiliate, this hotel is one of my favorites in Tokyo, for its calm peacefulness as well as its small-luxury-hotel service. Because it's a bit off the beaten path, it has a quieter, more relaxed atmosphere than those found at more centrally located hotels, evident the moment you step into its lobby lounge with its gas-flame fireplace on one end and the greenery of a garden on the other. Attracting mostly Japanese guests, it offers average-size rooms, the best of which are renovated rooms on higher floors (with



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Century Hyatt Tokyo **3**
- Hilton Tokyo **4**
- Hotel Century Southern Tower **8**
- Hotel Sunroute Tokyo **7**
- Park Hyatt Tokyo **1**
- Sunlite Hotel **14**

DINING ♦

- Ban-Thai **10**
- Daikokuya **9**
- Hakkaku **2**
- Kakiden **20**
- Kappoya Yaozen **21**
- New York Grill **1**
- Tsunahachi **18**

NIGHTLIFE ●

- Advocates **17**
- Christon Café **15**
- Code **12**
- Dubliners **19**
- Fukuriki Ichiza **13**
- Kinsmen **17**
- Kinswomyn **17**
- Liquid Room **11**
- New York Bar **1**
- Shinjuku Pit Inn **16**
- Vagabond **6**
- Volga **5**

an unfortunate choice of psychedelic carpet) with beds so comfortable you'd sneak them into your luggage if you could, pinpoint reading lights, and huge floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the hotel's own lush garden, a famed garden next door, or Tokyo Tower.

1-1-50 Shirokanedai, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8640. ☎ 800/333-3333 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/3447-3111. Fax 03/3447-3133. www.miyako-hotel-tokyo.co.jp. 498 units. ¥27,000 – ¥42,000 (\$225–\$350) single; ¥30,000 – ¥45,000 (\$250–\$375) double or twin; from ¥100,000 (\$833) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shirokanedai (4 min.) or Shirokane-Takanawa (5 min.); or free shuttle from Meguro or Shinagawa stations. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; bar; lounge; health club with 25m (82-ft.) indoor heated pool and sauna (fee: ¥700/\$5.85); concierge; tour desk; free shuttle service to Meguro Station every 15 min. and to Shinagawa Station (mornings only); shopping arcade; convenience store; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; dental/medical clinics. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet, trouser press.

ON OR NEAR ODAIBA/TOKYO BAY

Hotel Nikko Tokyo ★★ This is by far the most un-Tokyo-like hotel in the city. Opened in 1996 as the first hotel on Odaiba, an island of reclaimed land with a convention center, shopping malls, and sightseeing attractions, this grand, elegant lodging is surrounded by parks and gardens that give it a relaxed, resort-evoking atmosphere. Billing itself as an “urban resort,” it's especially popular with young well-to-do Japanese in search of an exotic weekend getaway. A curved facade assures waterfront views from most rooms, which have the added benefit of private balconies with two chairs. The most expensive rooms offer

commanding views of Tokyo Bay, Rainbow Bridge, and the city skyline (impressive at night); the least expensive rooms, smaller in size, face another hotel or the Maritime Museum and Haneda Airport across the bay. This is a great choice if you want to get away from the bustle of Tokyo, but the location can be a disadvantage; it's served only by the monorail Yurikamome Line, the JR Saikyo Line to Shibuya, and the inconvenient Rinkai Fukutoshin Line, which can be quite crowded on weekends, as can bus and taxi travel via the Rainbow Bridge or harbor tunnel.

1–9–1 Daiba, Minato-ku, Tokyo 135-8625. ☎ **800/645-5687** in the U.S. and Canada or 03/5500-5500. Fax 03/5500-2525. info@hnt.co.jp. 453 units. ¥28,000–¥40,000 (\$233–\$333) single; ¥33,000–¥45,000 (\$275–\$375) double or twin; from ¥80,000 (\$667) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Daiba (1 min.) or Tokyo Teleport (10 min.) **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; bar; lounge; spa with indoor pool connected to outdoor heated tub, Jacuzzi, and sun terrace overlooking Rainbow Bridge (fee: ¥3,000/\$25 the 1st day; thereafter ¥1,000/\$8.35); concierge; business center; room service (6am–11am and 6pm–2am); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

MODERATE GINZA

Hotel Monterey La Soeur ★★ *Finds* The Monterey chain targets female travelers with its feminine decor, and this hotel—designed by a woman—is no exception. A small, boutique-like hotel with a slight European ambience (note the display of Art Deco perfume bottles in the tiny lobby), it rises above the usual business hotel with small but comfortable rooms that show a woman's touch without being fussy and, in specially designated ladies' rooms, contain amenities geared toward women. If rooms here are full, try the nearby sister **Hotel Monterey Ginza** (☎ **03/3544-7111**), with the same boutique-hotel concept and similar prices.

1–10–18 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0061. ☎ **03/3562-7111**. Fax 03/3544-1600. 141 units. ¥13,500–¥14,000 (\$113–\$117) single; ¥18,000 (\$150) double; ¥24,000–¥26,000 (\$200–\$217) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Ginza Itchome (2 min.), or Ginza (4 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (French/Italian); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Mitsui Urban Hotel Ginza ★ Because of its great location, convenient to the Ginza, Shimbashi, and Hibiya shopping and business centers, this attractive hotel caters mostly to business travelers but appeals to tourists as well. The lobby, on the second floor, has a friendly staff. The bright and snazzy guest rooms are tiny but feature a few amenities usually found at more expensive hotels, including decent-size bathrooms with no-fog mirrors. Note, however, that the cheapest rooms have no closets and no space to unpack, a good example of what \$175 buys in Tokyo. I suggest asking for a room away from the highway overpass beside the hotel.

8–6–15 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo 104-0061. ☎ **03/3572-4131**. Fax 03/3572-4254. www.mitsuikanko.co.jp. 265 units. ¥14,000–¥17,500 (\$117–\$146) single; ¥21,000–¥24,500 (\$175–\$204) double; ¥21,000–¥30,000 (\$175–\$250) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shimbashi (2 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Western, Japanese, Chinese); 2 lounges; room service (Mon–Fri 10pm–1am); same-day laundry service. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, trouser press, washlet toilet.

AROUND TOKYO STATION

Tokyo Station Hotel ★ If you want quick access to the Shinkansen bullet train or Narita Airport (1 hr. by train), the Tokyo Station Hotel is the most convenient, medium-priced choice. Opened in 1915, this historic hotel occupies

the Marunouchi (west) side of the original, handsome, redbrick Tokyo Station, one of Tokyo's few prewar landmarks. Its unpretentious interior has changed little over the decades, from the old-fashioned, dark, and crowded lobby to the wood staircases leading to what are probably the widest corridors in Tokyo. Its rooms are large for Tokyo and offer views that could only excite a train buff. The most expensive twins are spacious, with high ceilings, floor-to-ceiling windows facing the front, and modern decor—but the red velvet furniture is a bit much. The cheaper rooms feature outdated floral wallpaper and face the interior of the station. In short, the hotel's quirky, eccentric interior amuses—it's so different from high-tech Tokyo that it's almost refreshing, if not endearing. Still, I advise asking to see a room before taking it, as rooms do vary. Holders of a Japan Rail Pass receive discounts.

1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100-0005. ☎ 03/3231-2511. Fax 03/3231-3513. www.tshl.co.jp. 59 units. ¥10,000–¥15,000 (\$83–\$125) single; ¥23,000 (\$192) double; ¥17,000–¥26,000 (\$142–\$217) twin. 10% discount for Japan Rail Pass holders. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Tokyo (it's in Tokyo Station). **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 3 bars; room service (weekdays 2–10pm; weekends/holidays 2–8pm); same-day laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

ASAKUSA

Asakusa View Hotel This is the only upper-bracket and modern hotel in the Asakusa area, and it looks almost out of place rising 28 stories above this famous district's older buildings. It's a good place to stay if you want to be in Tokyo's old downtown but don't want to sacrifice any creature comforts. The medium-size guest rooms are very pleasant, with sleek contemporary furnishings and bay windows that let in plenty of sunshine (and smaller windows that can be opened, a rarity in Tokyo); rooms facing the front have views over the famous Sensoji Temple. Eight Japanese-style rooms are also available, sleeping up to five people; on the same floor are a small, rooftop Japanese garden and Japanese-style public baths featuring tubs made of 2,000-year-old cypress.

Kokusai Dori, 3-17-1 Nishi-Asakusa, Taito-ku, Tokyo 111-8765. ☎ 03/3847-1111. Fax 03/3842-2117. www.viewhotels.co.jp/Asakusa. 337 units. ¥13,000–¥18,000 (\$108–\$150) single; ¥23,000–¥31,000 (\$192–\$258) double; ¥26,000–¥31,000 (\$217–\$258) twin; ¥34,000 (\$283) triple. Japanese-style rooms from ¥40,000 (\$333) for 2. Executive floor ¥32,000 (\$267) single or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Tawaramachi (8 min.). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; bar; lounge; 20m (66-ft.) indoor pool with retractable roof (fee: ¥3,000/\$25, but request a 50% discount coupon at the front desk); Japanese-style public baths (fee: ¥1,050/\$8.75); shopping arcade; salon; room service (7am–2am); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Hotel Sunroute Asakusa ★ Located on Kokusai Dori, this modern, pleasant hotel opened in 1998 as a business hotel but is a good choice for leisure travelers as well. Not only does it boast a good location near the sightseeing attractions of Asakusa, but it is classier than most business hotels, with Miró reprints in the lobby and modern artwork in each guest room. Though small, the (mostly single) rooms come with all the comforts, with slightly larger beds and bathrooms than those found at most business hotels. The hotel's one coffee shop, a chain called Jonathan's serving both Japanese and Western food, is open daily 24 hours.

1-8-5 Kaminarimon, Taito-ku, Tokyo 111-0034. ☎ 03/3847-1511. Fax 03/3847-1509. www.sunroute-asakusa.jp. 120 units. ¥8,500–¥10,500 (\$71–\$87) single; ¥14,500 (\$121) double; ¥16,500–¥19,000 (\$137–\$158) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Tawaramachi (1 min.); Asakusa (8 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant; same-day laundry service; nonsmoking rooms (singles only). *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

SHINJUKU

Hotel Century Southern Tower ★★☆☆ *Finds* Opened in 1998 and a welcome addition to the Shinjuku hotel scene, this sleek, modern hotel is located just south of the station and just a footbridge away from the huge Takashimaya Times Square shopping complex. Because it occupies the top floors of a sleek white building, it seems far removed from the hustle and bustle of Shinjuku below. Its 20th-floor lobby is simple and uncluttered and boasts almost surreal views of Tokyo stretching into the distance. Also on the 20th floor is Tribucks, a contemporary restaurant offering Asian- and European-influenced American food and great views of Shinjuku. Ask for a room on a high floor. Rooms facing east are considered best (and are therefore more expensive), especially at night when neon is in full regalia. Rooms facing west have views of Shinjuku's skyscrapers and, on clear days (mostly in winter), of Mount Fuji. A playful touch: The maps in each room outline the important buildings visible from your room.

2-2-1 Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 151-8583. ☎ 03/5354-0111. Fax 03/5354-0100. www.southerntower.co.jp. 375 units. ¥16,000–¥18,000 (\$133–\$150) single; ¥22,000–¥24,000 (\$183–\$200) twin; ¥22,000–¥28,000 (\$183–\$233) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinjuku (south exit, 3 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, contemporary American); lounge; exercise room (free); convenience store; 24-hr. Kinko's; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Hotel Sunroute Tokyo ☆☆☆ *Value* Conveniently located just a short walk southwest of Shinjuku Station, this no-frills hotel attracts a large foreign clientele and calls itself a “city hotel.” While it does boast a couple of restaurants and limited services, its guest rooms—mostly singles and twins—resemble those in a business hotel rather than tourist accommodations, with just the basics. Essentially, this is a place to sleep in a convenient location without spending a fortune.

2-3-1 Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 151-0053. ☎ 03/3375-3211. Fax 03/3379-3040. www.sunroute.jp. 546 units. ¥12,500–¥15,500 (\$104–\$129) single; ¥17,500 (\$146) double; ¥18,000–¥25,000 (\$150–\$208) twin. Rates include service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinjuku (3 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, Italian); bar; convenience store; salon; room service (11am–10:30pm); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

AOYAMA

President Hotel ★☆☆ *Value* This small hotel is a good choice for the budget-conscious business traveler, not only because it's a respected address in Tokyo but also thanks to its reasonable prices and great location, between Akasaka, Shinjuku, Aoyama, and Roppongi. It also offers some of the same conveniences and services as larger, more expensive hotels. The unpretentious lobby has a comfortable European atmosphere—you don't have to be embarrassed about meeting business clients here. Rooms, which are mostly singles, are tiny but cheerful, but you'll take your life in your own hands trying to shave in the dark bathrooms. Ask for a room on a high floor facing the front.

Aoyama Dori, 2-2-3 Minami Aoyama, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-8545. ☎ 03/3497-0111. Fax 03/3401-4816. www.president-hotel.co.jp. 210 units. ¥12,000–¥13,000 (\$100–\$108) single; ¥17,000 (\$142) double; ¥17,000–¥21,000 (\$142–\$175) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Aoyama-Itchome (1 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, French); coffee shop; room service (5–9pm); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

ROPPONGI & AKASAKA

Akasaka Excel Hotel Tokyo ★☆☆ This classy but simple business hotel boasts a high occupancy rate thanks to its ideal location in the middle of Akasaka and reasonable rates. Built in 1969 and undergoing a much-needed renovation in 2002, it's easily recognizable by its candy-striped exterior (it's called the “Pajama

Nightlife & Where to Stay & Dine in Asakusa



ACCOMMODATIONS ■

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Building” by the locals). Rooms feature shoji screens and window panels that slide shut for complete darkness, as well as windows that can be opened (a rarity in Tokyo). There are 200 single rooms, but the lower-priced ones are pretty small. There are also specialty rooms: 92 with free high-speed Internet access, 10 “Comfort Rooms” with massage chairs and specially designed pillows, and 17 “Ladies Rooms” with corridor camera surveillance and such extras as music jewelry boxes and herbal tea. Front-facing rooms look upon the whirl and neon of Akasaka; those in the back are quieter and face a steep slope of greenery.

2–14–3 Nagata-cho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo 100. ☎ 800/428-6598 in the U.S. or 03/3580-2311. Fax 03/3580-6066. www.tokyuhotels.co.jp. 535 units. ¥18,000–¥23,000 (\$150–\$192) single; ¥26,000 (\$217) double; ¥25,000–¥30,000 (\$208–\$250) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Akasaka-mitsuke (1 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, French); coffee shop; lounge; free shuttle service to Tokyo Disneyland; business center; shopping arcade; convenience store; salon; room service (7am–11:30pm); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Hotel Ibis The Ibis is about as close as you can get to the night action of Roppongi, just a minute’s walk away from Roppongi Crossing. It caters to both businessmen and couples who come to Roppongi’s discos and don’t make (or want to make) the last subway home. The lobby, with public computers available for accessing the Internet (and costing ¥500/\$4.15 for 25 min.), is on the fifth floor, with the guest rooms above. Small but comfortable, they feature modern furniture and windows that you can open—though with a freeway nearby, I’m not sure you’d want to. The cheapest doubles come with semi-double-size beds, just slightly wider than a single. On the 13th floor is a branch of the well-known Italian restaurant Sabatini, with views of the city.

7–14–4 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0032. ☎ 03/3403-4411. Fax 03/3479-0609. www.ibis-hotel.com. 182 units. ¥11,500–¥14,100 (\$96–\$118) single; ¥14,100–¥23,000 (\$117–\$192) double; ¥19,000–¥23,000 (\$158–\$192) twin; ¥24,000 (\$200) triple. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Roppongi (1 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Italian, pizza/pasta); coffee shop; room service (Mon–Fri 11:30am–9pm); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Roppongi Prince Hotel This is a good choice if you want to be close (about a 6-min. walk) to Roppongi’s night action yet somewhat removed. Opened in 1984, the hotel attracts Japanese businessmen on weekdays and vacationers ages 20 to 25 on weekends, and caters to them with a young and cheerful staff, modern designs with bold colors, and a resortlike atmosphere. The hotel wraps around an inner courtyard, which features a pool with a Jacuzzi and a heated deck—a solar mirror on the roof directs the sun’s rays toward the sunbathers below, making it Tokyo’s only outdoor heated pool open year-round. Unfortunately for the shy, sides of the raised pool are see-through acrylic, giving diners at the adjacent outdoor patio unique ringside views. Rooms are small but bright and modern, with either black or white decor.

3–2–7 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0032. ☎ 800/542-8686 in the U.S. and Canada or 03/3587-1111. Fax 03/3587-0770. www.princehotels.co.jp/Roppongi-e. 216 units. ¥18,500 (\$154) single; ¥21,500–¥24,500 (\$179–\$204) twin; ¥23,000–¥24,500 (\$192–\$204) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Roppongi (8 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Italian, tempura, sushi, teppanyaki); bar; outdoor heated pool and Jacuzzi open year-round (fee: ¥1,000/\$8); sauna; room service (11am–2am); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies and video games, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

SHIBUYA

Shibuya Excel Hotel Tokyu ⚡⚡ Connected to bustling Shibuya Station via footbridge and underground passage, this busy, modern hotel opened in 2000,

the first new hotel to debut in Shibuya in many years. It's been so successful (I don't know why no one thought of locating hotels in Shibuya before), Tokyu promptly built another one farther from the station. With an excellent location above Mark City shopping mall (reception is on the 5th floor), the Excel tries hard to appeal to everyone. For business travelers, there are "Excel" twin rooms that feature a fax/copier machine and high-speed dataports. For women, there are two floors reserved only for females and accessed by a special key, with in-room amenities, such as face cream, also geared to women. There are also rooms accessible to travelers with disabilities, and almost half the rooms are for non-smokers. All rooms are on the 7th to 24th floors and are comfortable. Ask for an upper-floor room facing Shinjuku; the night view is great. In-room refrigerators are empty so that you can stock up yourself from hotel vending machines, which, by the way, management claims are the largest in Japan.

1-12-2 Dogenzaka, Shibuya-ku 150-0043. ☎ **800/428-6598** in the U.S. or 03/5457-0109. Fax 03/5457-0309. www.tokyuhotels.co.jp. 408 units. ¥18,000–¥19,000 (\$150–\$158) single; ¥23,000–¥25,000 (\$192–\$208) double; ¥25,000–¥36,000 (\$208–\$300) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shibuya (1 min. by foot-bridge). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, French) plus many more in Mark City mall; room service (7–9am and 9pm–midnight); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; public fax and copy machine; shopping mall beneath hotel. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, dataport, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

SHINAGAWA

Le Meridien Pacific Tokyo 🌸🌸 This graceful and dignified hotel across the street from Shinagawa Station occupies grounds that once belonged to Japan's imperial family, a reminder of which remains in the peaceful, tranquil garden with a pond and a waterfall that serves as a dramatic backdrop for the lobby lounge. Approximately 50% of the hotel's guests are foreigners, mostly French, German, and American. Its location on the Yamanote Line makes it convenient for travel in the city, while trains to Kamakura and other points west and south and the Shinkansen bullet train make it convenient for travel farther afield. I also like its glass-enclosed coffee shop serving buffet meals. Room rates are based mostly on room size, with those facing the front slightly larger and offering partial views of Tokyo Bay between buildings. Smaller rooms facing the back are a bargain, as they face the garden and are quieter. However, rooms themselves offer nothing out of the ordinary and most bathrooms are surprisingly small, with almost no counter space to speak of. **Tip:** The outdoor pool's fee is for use of a locker; forgo that, and you can use the pool free of charge.

3-13-3 Takanawa, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8567. ☎ **800/543-4300** in the U.S. or 03/3445-6711. Fax 03/3445-5733. www.htl-pacific.co.jp. 954 units. ¥21,000–¥25,500 (\$175–\$213) single; ¥25,000–¥38,000 (\$208–\$317) twin or double; from ¥50,000 (\$412) suite. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinagawa (1 min.). **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; 2 bars; lounge; outdoor pool (fee for locker: ¥1,000/\$8); access to fitness center at Le Meridien Grand Pacific in Odaiba (fee: ¥1,050/\$8.75); concierge; free shuttle bus to Le Meridien Grand Pacific Tokyo Hotel in Odaiba and Tokyo Disneyland; business center; small shopping arcade; salon; room service (6am–midnight); in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, high-speed dataport (not in all rooms), minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Shinagawa Prince Hotel 🧒 With four white buildings added at various stages (each with its own check-in), the Shinagawa Prince is the largest sleep factory in Japan. It's a virtual city within a city, with more than a dozen food and beverage outlets, a 10-screen cinema complex, a large sports center (with nine indoor tennis courts, an 80-lane bowling center, and an indoor golf practice center), a SEGA amusement/arcade-game center, indoor and outdoor pools, and

a fitness center. It caters to Japanese businessmen on weekdays and students and family vacationers on weekends and holidays. Rooms vary widely depending on which building you select: The Main Tower has only very small singles, at the cheapest rates; the Annex has singles, twins, and doubles in a medium price range; the more expensive 39-story New Tower, with its outdated pastel colors and mostly twins, is no longer very new; the upscale Executive Tower, with only doubles, has the smartest-looking rooms and the highest prices. Be sure to have a drink or meal at the 39th-floor Top of Shinagawa; its views of Tokyo Bay and the rest of Tokyo are among the best in the city. With its many diversions, this hotel is like a resort getaway, but it's too big and too busy for my taste.

4–10–30 Takanawa, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-8611. ☎ 800/542-8686 in the U.S. or Canada or 03/3440-1111. Fax 03/3441-7092. 3,680 units. ¥9,800–¥18,000 (\$82–\$150) single; ¥14,100–¥27,500 (\$117–\$229) twin; ¥14,600–¥31,000 (\$122–\$258) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinagawa (2 min.). **Amenities:** 14 restaurants; bar; 24-hr. Internet cafe; sports center (various fees charged, ¥1,000/\$8.30 for indoor pool); cinema complex; IMAX; amusement arcade; children's day-care center; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade; convenience store; salon; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE AROUND TOKYO STATION

Hotel Yaesu Ryumeikan ★ *Value* This 40-year-old, nondescript hotel is your best bet for reasonably priced lodging just minutes from Tokyo Station. From the north Yaesu exit, turn left onto Sotobori Dori; the hotel will be on your right, just before Eitai Dori. Surprising for this location, it offers both

Narita Stopover

An early departure out of Narita Airport? A late-night arrival? It might make sense to spend the night near the airport. Topping the list is the **Hilton Narita**, 456 Kosuge, Narita, Chiba 286-0127 (☎ 800/HILTONS in the U.S. or Canada or 0476/33-1121; fax 0476/33-0369; www.hilton.com), a 10-minute free shuttle ride from the airport. With a glass-enclosed garden and waterfall centered in its lobby, it's the only airport hotel that imparts an Asian flair. Facilities include three restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, coffee shop), a top-floor bar with views of the airport, a health club with gym and outdoor pool, and 540 good-size rooms with all the amenities you'd expect. Rates range from ¥23,000 to ¥26,000 (\$192–\$217) for one person and ¥27,000 to ¥34,000 (\$225–\$283) for two.

The 500-room **Holiday Inn Tobu Narita**, 320–1 Tokko, Narita, Chiba 286-0106 (☎ 800/HOLIDAY or 0476/32-1234; fax 0476/32-0617; www.holidayinntobunarita.com), is a 5-minute free shuttle ride from the airport and offers slightly cheaper rates than the Hilton (see above), starting at ¥12,000 (\$100) for a single and ¥18,000 (\$150) for a twin. Facilities include a coffee shop, a Chinese restaurant, and a health club with indoor pool and gym.

If you have 3 hours to spare, consider an excursion to **Narita** (10 min. by train from the airport; most airport hotels also offer shuttle buses), a quaint village with a winding, shop-lined street leading to Naritasan Temple, an impressive complex consisting of a main hall, several pagodas, and a nice park.

Japanese-style tatami rooms and Western-style rooms with beds. I personally prefer the Japanese-style rooms, especially the most expensive tatami rooms, which have a nice, traditional feel and come with a sitting alcove and Japanese-style deep tub. Only Japanese breakfasts are available; if you can't stomach rice and fish in the morning, opt for a room without breakfast and subtract ¥1,000 (\$8.35) per person from the rates below.

1-3-22 Yaesu, Chuo-ku 103-0028. ☎ 03/3271-0971. Fax 03/3271-0977. www.ryumeikan.co.jp/yaesu.html. 30 units (23 with bathroom, 5 with toilet only, 2 without bathroom). ¥8,000 (\$67) single without bathroom, ¥9,500 (\$79) single with toilet only, ¥10,000–¥13,000 (\$83–\$108) single with bathroom; ¥14,000 (\$117) double with toilet only, ¥17,000–¥18,000 (\$142–\$150) double with bathroom. Rates include Japanese breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Tokyo (3 min. from the north Yaesu exit), or Nihombashi (exit A3, 1 min.). On the corner of Eitai Dori and Sotobori Dori. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Italian); coffee shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

ASAKUSA

Ryokan Shigetsu ★★ *Finds* Whenever a foreigner living in Tokyo, soon to play host to first-time visitors to Japan, asks me to recommend a moderately priced ryokan in Tokyo, this is the one I most often suggest. It has a great location in Asakusa just off Nakamise Dori, a colorful, shop-lined pedestrian street leading to the famous Sensoji Temple—an area that gives you a feel for the older Japan. A member of the Japanese Inn Group, it represents the best of modern yet traditional Japanese design—simple yet elegant, with shoji, unadorned wood, and artwork throughout. Two public Japanese baths have views of the nearby five-story pagoda. A Japanese restaurant serves excellent Japanese breakfasts, as well as mini-kaiseki dinners (discounts given to hotel guests; reserve 1 week in advance; closed Sun–Mon) and lunches. There are 11 Western-style rooms, but I prefer the 12 slightly more expensive Japanese-style tatami rooms, which include Japanese-style mirrors and comfortable chairs for those who don't like relaxing on the floor. In short, this establishment costs no more than a regular business hotel but has much more class.

1-31-11 Asakusa, Taito-ku 111-0032. ☎ 03/3843-2345. Fax 03/3843-2348. www.shigetsu.com. 23 units. ¥7,300–¥9,000 (\$61–\$75) single; ¥14,000–¥16,000 (\$117–\$133) twin. Japanese or Western breakfast ¥1,200 (\$10) extra, Japanese dinner ¥3,500 (\$29) extra. AE, MC, V. Station: Asakusa (4 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); Apple laptop in lobby providing free Internet access; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Sakura Ryokan *Kids* A member of the Japanese Inn and Welcome Inn groups, this concrete, family-run establishment with an elevator is a combination business-tourist hotel and caters to both Japanese and foreign guests. It's located in Asakusa just northwest of the Kappabashi Dori and Kototoi Dori intersection, about a 12-minute walk from Sensoji Temple. The reception area is on the second floor, and the friendly owner speaks some English. Rooms are spotless, and all come with a sink and an alarm clock. Both Western- and Japanese-style rooms are available with or without private bathroom. The single rooms are quite spacious compared to those in business hotels. There's one Japanese-style room, complete with a terrace, large enough for a family of six or seven.

2-6-2 Iriya, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0013. ☎ 03/3876-8118. Fax 03/3873-9456. www.sakura-ryokan.com. 20 units, 9 with bathroom. ¥5,300–¥5,500 (\$44–\$46) single without bathroom, ¥6,300 (\$52) single with bathroom; ¥9,600 (\$80) double without bathroom, ¥10,600 (\$88) double with bathroom; ¥12,600–¥13,500 (\$105–\$112) triple without bathroom, ¥13,800–¥15,600 (\$115–\$130) triple with bathroom. Japanese or Western breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra; Japanese dinner ¥1,600 (\$13) extra (reservations required). AE, MC, V. Station: Iriya (6 min.; exit 1 or 2). **Amenities:** Computer with Internet access free for guest use; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

UENO

Annex Katsutaro ★★ *Finds* Opened in 2001, this thoroughly modern concrete ryokan is a standout for its simple yet chic designs, spotless Japanese-style rooms (all with bathroom), and location—right in the heart of Yanaka with its old-fashioned neighborhood and about a 20-minute walk northwest of Ueno Park. The Keisei Skyliner from Narita Airport stops at nearby Nippori Station. If you have your own laptop and LAN card, you can tap into the Internet free of charge from your own room, though for those without, there's a public computer guests can use for free. There should be more places like this, but if it's full, don't let management talk you into taking a room in its much older main Ryokan Katsutaro; it's not nearly as nice as the annex.

3-8-4 Yanaka, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0001. ☎ **03/3828-2500**. Fax 03/3821-5400. www.katsutaro.com. 17 units. ¥6,000 (\$50) single; ¥10,000–¥12,000 (\$83–\$100) twin; ¥14,000–¥16,000 (\$117–\$133) triple. Continental breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra. AE, MC, V. Station: Sendagi (2 min.) or Nippori (7 min.). **Amenities:** Computer with Internet access free for guest use; coin-op washers and dryers; free coffee service. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer.

Homeikan ★★★ *Finds* Although a bit of a hike from Ueno Park (about 30 min.) and not as conveniently located as the other ryokan, this lovely place is my personal number-one choice if you want to experience an authentic, traditional ryokan in a typical residential neighborhood. It consists of three separate buildings acquired over the last century by the present owner's grandfather. Homeikan, the main building (Honkan), was purchased almost 100 years ago; today it is listed as a "Tangible Cultural Property" and is used mainly by groups of students and seniors. Across the street is Daimachi Bekkan, built after World War II to serve as the family home. A beautiful, 31-room property, it boasts a private Japanese garden with a pond, public baths (including one open 24 hr.), and wood-inlaid and pebbled hallways leading to nicely detailed tatami rooms adorned with such features as gnarled wood trimming and sitting alcoves, as well as simpler tatami rooms for budget travelers. This is where most foreigners stay, and if you opt for meals, they will be served in your room in true ryokan fashion. The third building, Morikawa Bekkan, about a 5-minute walk away, was built as an inn about 45 years ago and, with 35 rooms, is the largest. Owner Koike-san, who speaks excellent English, points out that travelers who need the latest in creature comforts (including private bathrooms) should go elsewhere; those seeking a traditional ryokan experience, however, will not be disappointed.

5-10-5 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku, Tokyo 113-0033. ☎ **03/3811-1181** or 02/3811-1187. Fax 03/3811-1764. www1.odn.ne.jp/homeikan. 91 units, none with bathroom. ¥6,500–¥7,000 (\$54–\$58) single; ¥11,000–¥12,000 (\$92–\$100) double; ¥13,500–¥15,000 (\$112–\$125) triple. ¥500 (\$4.15) more per person in peak season; ¥500 (\$4.15) less per person in off season. Western or Japanese breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35); Japanese dinner ¥2,000 (\$17; not available 1st night of stay). AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Hongo Sanchoe (8 min.) or Kasuga (5 min.). *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

Ryokan Sawanoya ★ Although this family-run ryokan is relatively modern looking and unexciting, it's delightfully located in a wonderful residential area of old Tokyo, northwest of Ueno Park and within walking distance of the park's many attractions and Nezu Shrine. Upon your arrival, the owner, English-speaking Sawa-san, will give you a short tour of the establishment before taking you to your tatami room, and throughout the place are written explanations to help the ryokan novice. He can also give you a map outlining places of interest in the vicinity, as well as pamphlets on inexpensive accommodations throughout Japan; if you pay for the call, he'll even make your next reservation with another Japanese Inn Group lodging. Once a week or so, Sawa-san's son provides guests

with a special treat—a traditional Japanese lion dance, free of charge. His daughter-in-law sometimes gives demonstrations of the tea ceremony. In short, this is a great place to stay, thanks to Sawa-san's enthusiastic devotion to his neighborhood, which he readily imparts to his guests. I highly recommended this ryokan.

2–3–11 Yanaka, Taito-ku, Tokyo 110-0001. ☎ 03/3822-2251. Fax 03/3822-2252. www.sawanoya.com. 12 units, 2 with bathroom. ¥4,700–¥5,000 (\$39–\$42) single without bathroom; ¥8,800 (\$73) double without bathroom, ¥9,400 (\$78) double with bathroom; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple without bathroom, ¥13,500 (\$113) triple with bathroom. Breakfast of toast and fried eggs ¥300 (\$2.50) extra; Japanese breakfast ¥900 (\$7.80) extra. AE, MC, V. Closed Dec 29–Jan 3. Station: Nezu (exit 1, 7 min.). **Amenities:** Computer with Internet access free for guest use; coin-op washers and dryers (free laundry detergent); ironing board, iron, and trouser press (on 3rd floor); free coffee/tea service; public fridge. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

SHINJUKU

Sunlite Hotel In 1985 this business hotel moved across the street from its old location into a new building, turning the older building into the Hotel Sunlite Annex (the cheaper rates below are in the older annex). A plus to staying here: the weekly antiques flea markets held at nearby Hanazono Shrine. Rooms are cheerful and clean, although annex rooms are small (its singles are minuscule). Feelings of claustrophobia are somewhat mitigated by windows that can be opened. The main (new) building's corner twins with windows on two sides are the best. **Note:** If you're a night prowler, beware: Doors close at 2am and don't reopen until 5:30am.

5–15–8 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160-0022. ☎ 03/3356-0391. Fax 03/3356-1223. 197 units. ¥8,300–¥8,900 (\$69–\$74) single; ¥13,500–¥15,000 (\$113–\$125) twin; ¥14,000 (\$117) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinjuku (12 min.) or Shinjuku Sancho (5 min.). The hotel is on the east side of Shinjuku Station, on Meiji Dori. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); coffee shop; same-day laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Tokyo International Youth Hostel *Value* This spotless hostel, operated by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and situated in a high-rise, is definitely the best place to stay in its price range—it offers fantastic Tokyo views. Even the public baths boast good views (especially at night). All beds are dormitory style, with two, four, or five bunk beds to a room. Rooms are very pleasant, with big windows, and each bed has its own curtain for privacy and its own locker. There are also accessible rooms for travelers with disabilities, and two Japanese-style tatami rooms for families that sleep up to six persons. If there are vacancies, you can stay longer than the normal 3-day maximum. In summer, it's a good idea to reserve about 3 months in advance. It's closed from 10am to 3pm and locked at 10:30pm (lights out at 11pm).

1–1 Kagura-kashi, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 162-0823. ☎ 03/3235-1107. Fax 03/3264-4000. www.tokyo-yh.jp. 158 beds. ¥3,500 (\$29) adult, ¥2,000 (\$17) child. Breakfast ¥400 (\$3.35); dinner ¥900 (\$7.50). No youth-hostel card required; no age limit. No credit cards. Closed Dec 29–Jan 3. Station: Iidabashi (2 min.). Reception is on the 18th floor of the Central Plaza Building. **Amenities:** Shopping mall on 1st and 2nd floors of same building; washer and dryer free of charge. *In room:* A/C, no phone.

HARAJUKU & AOYAMA

National Children's Castle Hotel (Kodomo-no-Shiro Hotel) *Kids* The National Children's Castle Hotel, located on Aoyama Dori about halfway between Aoyama and Shibuya (and a bit of a trek from either station), is a great place to stay if you're traveling with children. Located on the sixth and seventh floors, the hotel is plain rather than playful, but the complex boasts Tokyo's best and most sophisticated indoor/outdoor playground for children. Guests range from businesspeople on weekdays to families and young college students on weekends. The rooms—mainly twins—are simple and of adequate size, with

large windows. The most expensive twins, which face Shinjuku, have the best views and are a great value. Note that the hotel's three singles do not have windows, but you can pay extra to stay in a twin. The three Japanese-style rooms, available for three or more people, are a good way for families to experience the traditional Japanese lifestyle. Make reservations at least 2 months in advance, especially if you plan on being in Tokyo in the summer. Note that there's an 11pm curfew, check-in isn't until 3pm, and not much English is spoken.

5-53-1 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0001. ☎ 03/3797-5677. Fax 03/3406-7805. www.kodomo-shiro.or.jp/hotel/english.htm. 27 units. ¥6,400 (\$53) single; ¥14,000 – ¥15,400 (\$117–\$128) twin; ¥6,800 (\$57) per person Japanese-style room. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Omotesando (8 min.) or Shibuya (10 min.). Front desk on the 7th floor. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western); National Children's Castle. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, washlet toilet.

ROPPONGI & AKASAKA

Arca Torre *(Value)* This smart-looking, 10-story property looks expensive but is actually a business hotel. Opened in 2002, it has a great location on Roppongi Dori, between Roppongi Crossing and the new urban development of Roppongi Hills, making it popular with both business types and tourists on a budget. Its (mostly single) rooms are small but cheerful, with flat-panel TVs and a bottle of complimentary bottled water in the otherwise empty fridge. Rooms facing the back are quiet but face another building. If you opt for a room facing the front, ask for a high floor above the freeway; otherwise your view will be of cars and, at certain times of the day, traffic jams.

6-1-23 Roppongi, Minato-ku, Tokyo 106-0032. ☎ 03/3404-5111. Fax 03/3404-5115. 77 units. ¥11,000 – ¥13,000 (\$92–\$108) single; ¥14,000 – ¥17,000 (\$117–\$142) double; ¥21,000 (\$175) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Roppongi (1 min.). **Amenities:** Coffee shop; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Asia Center of Japan *(Value)* Great rates make this a top choice if you're looking for inexpensive Western-style accommodations in the center of town. It's so popular that it's often fully booked (try to reserve months in advance). Everyone—from businessmen to students to travelers to foreigners teaching English—stays here; I know one teacher who lived here for years. Resembling a college dormitory, the Asia Center is popular with area office workers for its inexpensive cafeteria with outdoor seating. Accommodations are basic, with few frills, and in the singles you can almost reach out and touch all four walls. The cheapest doubles are actually single rooms with small, semi-double-size beds (not quite full size but larger than single/twin size). Female travelers should avoid rooms on the ground floor—the windows can open and in Japan there are no screens. Tucked on a side street off Gaien-Higashi Dori not far from Aoyama Dori, the center is about a 15-minute walk to the nightlife of Roppongi or Akasaka, or one station away by subway.

8-10-32 Akasaka, Minato-ku, Tokyo 107-0052. ☎ 03/3402-6111. Fax 03/3402-0738. www.asiacenter.or.jp. 171 units. ¥7,800 – ¥9,800 (\$65–\$82) single; ¥11,800 – ¥13,800 (\$98–\$115) double; ¥15,800 (\$132) twin; ¥17,800 – ¥19,800 (\$146–\$165) triple. AE, MC, V. Station: Aoyama-Itchome (exit 4, 5 min.), Nogizaka (exit 3, 5 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, high-speed dataport (not all rooms), fridge, hair dryer.

SHINAGAWA

Family Inn Fifty's Despite its catchy name, little English is spoken at this wannabe American 1950s-style motel. Opened in 2000, it sports red bar stools in its lobby and photos of Marilyn Monroe and other American icons in the rooms, but otherwise this is a no-nonsense but cheerful accommodation,

offering identical, small rooms with one double bed, a sofa bed, and a tiled bathroom but no closet. A machine handles check-in (you'll need a credit card; the front desk staff will guide you through the process). And you'll save ¥1,000 (\$8.35) per night on the rates below if you book your reservation online. If you want a smoking room, you'll pay ¥1,000 (\$8.35) more than the quoted rates; you even pay extra for slippers here. Still, there aren't many places this cheap, this straightforward, and this streamlined in Japan. A motel chain in the making?

1-3-25 Osaki, Shinagawa-ku, Tokyo 141-0032. ☎ 03/3490-0050. www.fiftys.com. 50 units. ¥6,000 (\$50) single; ¥9,000 (\$75) twin; ¥10,000 (\$83) triple. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Station: Osaki (2 min.); from the east exit, turn left and take the stairs or elevator to ground level, cross under the highway, and then turn left. **Amenities:** Internet computer in the lobby (fee: ¥500/\$4.15 for 2 hr.); nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Toyoko Inn Shinagawa-Eki Takanawaguchi ★ *Value* I like this hotel chain for its clean functional rooms, complimentary breakfast of coffee and pastries served in the lobby, free use of dataports (and for those who don't have their own laptop, free use of a computer in the lobby), and complimentary movies (unfortunately in Japanese only). Rooms are mostly singles and doubles, but the 25 twin rooms feature beds perpendicular to one another rather than crowded side-by-side, a plus for people who like traveling together but don't necessarily want to be *that* close.

4-23-2 Takanawa, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108-0074. ☎ 03/3280-1045. Fax 03/3280-1046. www.toyoko-inn.co.jp. 181 units. ¥6,800 (\$57) single; ¥8,800 (\$73) double; ¥9,800 (\$82) twin. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinagawa (3 min.). From JR Station's Takanawa (west) exit, turn left. **Amenities:** Computer with Internet access free for hotel guests; laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, dataport, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

IKEBUKURO

Kimi Ryokan ★ This has long been a Tokyo favorite for inexpensive Japanese-style lodging. Spotlessly clean and with such Japanese touches as sliding screens, flower arrangements in public spaces, and traditional Japanese music playing softly in the hallways, it caters almost exclusively to foreigners (mostly 20-somethings) and is so popular there's sometimes a waiting list to get in. A bulletin board lists apartments for rent and job opportunities (primarily teaching English); a lounge with cable/satellite TV is a favorite hangout and a good place to network with other travelers. Rooms are Japanese style, with singles and the cheapest doubles the size of 4½ tatami mats and the larger doubles the size of six tatami mats (a single tatami measures 1m/3 ft. by 2m/6 ft.). Note that there's a 1m curfew.

2-36-8 Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku, Tokyo 171-0014. ☎ 03/3971-3766. Fax 03/3987-1326. www.kimi-ryokan.jp. 38 units, none with bathroom. ¥4,500 (\$37) single; ¥6,500 – ¥7,500 (\$54–\$62) double. Rates include tax. No credit cards. Station: Ikebukuro (west exit, 5 min.). The police station (take the west exit from Ikebukuro Station and turn right) has maps that will guide you to Kimi. *In room:* A/C.

4 Where to Dine

From stand-up noodle shops and pizzerias to exclusive kaiseki restaurants and sushi bars, there are at least 80,000 restaurants in Tokyo—which gives you some idea of how fond the Japanese are of eating out. In a city where apartments are so small and cramped that entertaining at home is almost unheard of, restaurants serve as places for socializing, meeting friends, and wooing business associates—as well as great excuses for drinking a lot of beer, sake, and whiskey.

HOW TO DINE IN TOKYO WITHOUT SPENDING A FORTUNE I know people in Tokyo who claim they haven't cooked in years—and they're not millionaires. They simply take advantage of one of the best deals in Tokyo—the fixed-price lunch, usually available from 11am to 2pm. Called a *teishoku* in a Japanese restaurant, a fixed-price meal is likely to include soup, a main dish such as tempura or whatever the restaurant specializes in, pickled vegetables, rice, and tea. In restaurants serving Western food, the fixed-price lunch is variously referred to as a set lunch, *seto coursu* or simply *coursu*, and usually includes an appetizer, a main course with one or two side dishes, coffee or tea, and sometimes dessert. Even restaurants listed under **Very Expensive**—where you'd otherwise spend at least ¥12,000 (\$100) or more for dinner (excluding drinks)—and **Expensive**—where you can expect to pay ¥8,000 to ¥12,000 (\$67–\$100) for dinner—usually offer set-lunch menus, allowing you to dine in style at very reasonable prices. To keep your costs down, therefore, try having your biggest meal at lunch, avoiding, if possible, the noon-to-1pm weekday crush when Tokyo's army of office workers flood area restaurants. Since the Japanese tend to order fixed-price meals rather than a la carte, set dinners are also usually available (though they're not as cheap as set lunches). All-you-can-eat buffets (called *viking* in Japanese), offered by many hotel restaurants, are also bargain meals for hearty appetites.

So many of Tokyo's good restaurants fall into the **Moderate** category that it's tempting to simply eat your way through the city—and the range of cuisines is so great you could eat something different at each meal. A dinner in this category will average ¥4,000 to ¥8,000 (\$33–\$67). Lunch is likely to cost half as much.

Many of Tokyo's most colorful, noisy, and popular restaurants fall into the **Inexpensive** category, where meals usually go for less than ¥4,000 (\$33); many offer meals for less than ¥2,000 (\$17) and lunches for ¥1,000 (\$8.35) and less. The city's huge working population heads to these places to catch a quick lunch or to socialize with friends after hours. In the past few years, a number of excellent yet inexpensive French bistros and Italian trattorie have burst onto the culinary scene. Ethnic restaurants, particularly those serving Indian, Chinese, and other Asian cuisines, are also plentiful and usually inexpensive. Hotel restaurants are also good bargains for inexpensive set lunches. Finally, see “Tokyo After Dark,” in chapter 4 for suggestions on inexpensive drinking places that serve food.

OTHER DINING NOTES The restaurants listed below are organized first by neighborhood and then by price category. For information on Japanese food, refer to “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style” in chapter 2.

Tips Mapping Out Tokyo's Restaurants

You can locate the restaurants reviewed below using the following neighborhood maps:

- To locate restaurants in **Akasaka**, p. 119.
 - To locate restaurants in **Ueno**, p. 127.
 - To locate restaurants in **Shinjuku**, p. 128.
 - To locate restaurants in **Asakusa**, p. 133.
 - To locate restaurants in **Hibiya** and **Ginza**, p. 144.
 - To locate restaurants in **Harajuku**, p. 159.
 - To locate restaurants in **Roppongi**, p. 165.
-

Note that a 5% consumption tax will be added to restaurant bills. In addition, many first-class restaurants, as well as hotel restaurants, will add a 10% to 15% service charge. Unless otherwise stated, the prices I've given do not include the extra tax and service charge.

Note that restaurants that have no signs in English letters are preceded by a numbered icon, which is keyed to a list of **Japanese symbols** in appendix C.

Finally, keep in mind that the **last order** is taken at least 30 minutes before the restaurant's actual closing time, sometimes even an hour before closing at the more exclusive restaurants.

HIBIYA & GINZA

VERY EXPENSIVE

Kamon ★★☆☆ TEPPANYAKI Kamon, which means "Gate of Celebration," has an interior that could be a statement about Tokyo itself—traditionally Japanese yet ever so high-tech. Seating at the restaurant, which is located on the 17th floor of the Imperial Hotel, is at one of several large counters (some with views over Hibiya), with grills in the center where expert chefs prepare excellent teppanyaki before your eyes. Japanese sirloin steaks or filets, cooked to perfection, are available, as well as seafood ranging from fresh prawns and scallops to crabmeat and fish, and seasonal vegetables. The service is, of course, imperial.

On the 17th floor of the Imperial Hotel, 1-1-1 Uchisaiwai-cho. ☎ 03/3504-1111. Reservations recommended for dinner. Set dinner ¥12,000–¥18,000 (\$100–\$150); set lunch ¥3,500–¥7,000 (\$29–\$48). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–9:30pm. Station: Hibiya (1 min.).

① **Sushiko** ★★☆☆ SUSHI If you're in pursuit of top-quality sushi, your search will eventually take you here, considered by some to be one of the best sushi bars in town. There's no written menu, and the counter seats 11 customers only. Owned by a fourth-generation restaurateur, this establishment doesn't display its fish as most sushi bars do, but keeps it freshly refrigerated until the moment it meets the swift blade of the expert chefs. Unless you know your sushi, you're best off telling the chef how much you want to spend and letting him take it from there.

6-3-8 Ginza. ☎ 03/3571-1968. Reservations required. Meals ¥10,000–¥15,000 (\$83–\$125). AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10:30pm. Station: Ginza or Hibiya (4 min.). A block east of the elevated tracks of the JR Yamanote Line, on the Ginza side on Sukiyabashi Dori.

EXPENSIVE

Ten-ichi ★ TEMPURA In this restaurant, located on Namiki Dori in the heart of Ginza's nightlife, you can sit at a counter and watch the chef prepare your meal. This is the main shop of a 70-year-old restaurant chain that helped the tempura style of cooking gain worldwide recognition by serving important foreign customers. Today, Ten-ichi still has one of the best reputations in town for serving the most delicately fried foods, along with its special sauce (or, if you prefer, you can dip the morsels in lemon juice with a pinch of salt).

There are 10 Ten-ichi restaurants in Tokyo, including the Ginza Sony Building at the intersection of Harumi Dori and Sotobori Dori (☎ 03/3571-3837; station: Hibiya or Ginza), the Imperial Hotel's Tower basement (☎ 03/3503-1001; station: Hibiya), and Isetan department store, 3-14-1 Shinjuku (☎ 03/5379-3039; station: Shinjuku Sancho-me).

6-6-5 Ginza. ☎ 03/3571-1949. Reservations recommended for lunch, required for dinner. Set dinner ¥10,000–¥18,000 (\$83–\$150); set lunch ¥7,000–¥10,000 (\$58–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–9:30pm. Station: Ginza (3 min.). On Namiki Dori.

Nightlife & Where to Stay & Dine in Hibiya & Ginza

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

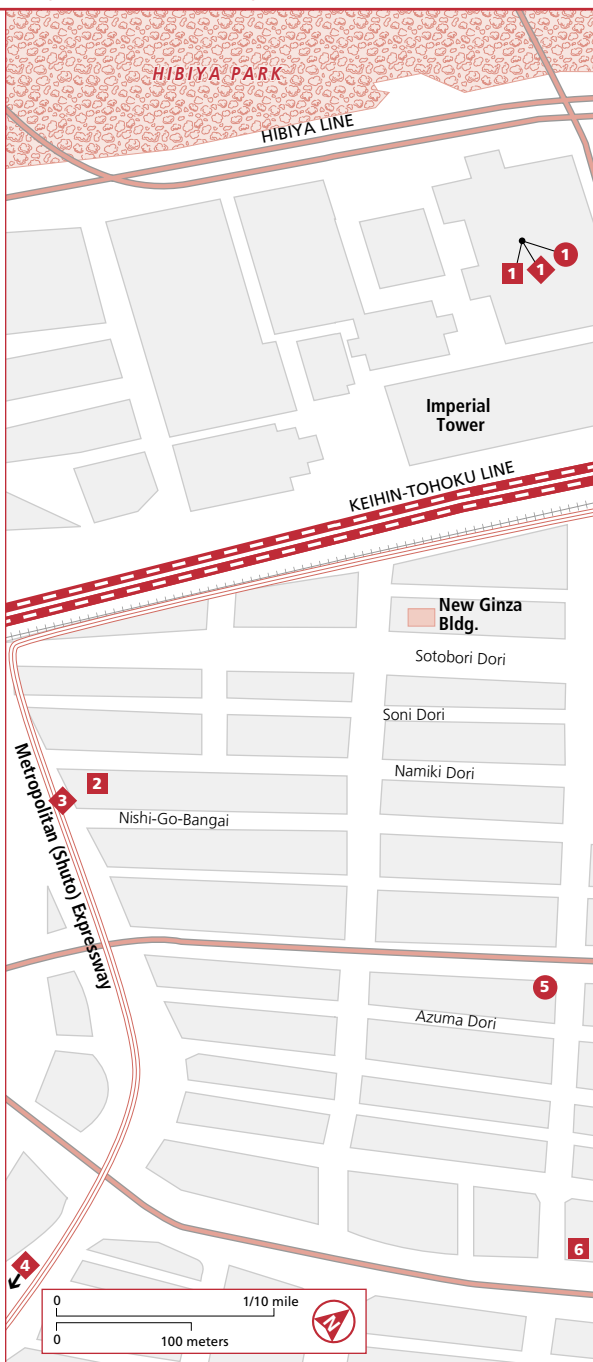
- Hotel Monterey La Soeur **23**
- Imperial Hotel **1**
- Mitsui Urban Hotel Ginza **2**
- Renaissance Tokyo Hotel
Ginza Tobu **6**

DINING ◆

- Atariya **19**
- Donto **8**
- Farm Grill **3**
- Fukusuke **12**
- Ginza Daimasu **18**
- Gonpachi **21**
- Imperial Viking **1**
- Kamon **1**
- Kihachi **15**
- Kushi Colza **10**
- La Boheme **11**
- Ohmatsuya **13**
- Rangetsu **20**
- Shabusen **22**
- Sushiko **9**
- Ten-Ichi **14**
- Yakitori under the tracks **25**
- Zest Cantina **21**
- Zipangu **4**

NIGHTLIFE ●

- Kabukiza **24**
- Lupin **16**
- Nanbantei **17**
- Old Imperial **1**
- Sapporo Lion **5**
- Takarazuka Gekijo **7**





MODERATE

② **Donto** ★★ *Finds* **VARIED JAPANESE** Located in Hibiya on Harumi Dori in the basement of an unlikely looking office building, this is a great place for lunch. Popular with the local working crowd (and therefore best avoided noon–1pm), it’s pleasantly decorated in a rustic style with shoji screens, wooden floors, and an open kitchen. Take off your shoes at the entryway and put them into one of the wooden lockers. Choose what you want from the plastic display case, which shows various *teishoku* and set meals. Everything from noodles, sashimi, tempura, and *obento* to *kaiseki* is available. Unfortunately, the best deals are daily specials written in Japanese only; ask about them or look around at what others are eating.

There’s another Donto on the 49th floor of the Sumitomo Building in Shinjuku (☎ 03/3344-6269; station: Tochomae).

Yurakucho Denki Building basement, 1–7–1 Yurakucho, on Harumi Dori. ☎ 03/3201-3021. Set dinner ¥3,500–¥7,500 (\$29–\$62); set lunch ¥830–¥1,000 (\$6.90–\$8.35). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–2pm and 5–11pm. Closed holidays. Station: Hibiya (1 min.).

③ **Ginza Daimasu** **KAISEKI/OBENTO** This 65-year-old restaurant has a simple, modern decor with Japanese touches. Experienced, kimono-clad waitresses serve artfully arranged set meals from the English-language menu. The *Fukiyose-zen obento*—many delicate dishes served in three courses—includes beautiful tempura delicacies served in an edible basket and a menu (in Japanese) explaining what you’re eating. A plastic-food display in the front window will help you recognize the restaurant. Set lunches are served until 3pm.

6–9–6 Ginza. ☎ 03/3571-3584. Reservations required for *kaiseki*. *Kaiseki* ¥5,000–¥12,000 (\$42–\$100); *obento* ¥2,300–¥3,800 (\$19–\$32); set lunch ¥2,000–¥2,500 (\$17–\$21). DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–9:30pm (last order 8:30pm). Station: Ginza (2 min.). Across from Matsuzakaya department store on Chuo Dori.

Imperial Viking ★ **INTERNATIONAL** No, this has nothing to do with Scandinavian invaders; rather, *viking* is the Japanese word for “all-you-can-eat buffet,” and though lots of Tokyo hotels now offer such spreads, this 17th-floor restaurant has been serving buffets for more than 40 years. It offers more than 40 mostly European and some international dishes, which vary according to seasonal food promotions spotlighting a country’s cuisine, from Indonesian to Swiss. Views are of Ginza and Hibiya Park, and there’s live jazz music in the evenings. This restaurant has enjoyed great popularity for decades, making reservations a must.

Imperial Hotel, 17th floor, 1–1–1 Uchisaiwai-cho. ☎ 03/3504-1111. Reservations recommended. Buffet dinner ¥7,500 (\$63); buffet lunch ¥5,000 (\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9:30pm. Station: Hibiya (1 min.).

Kihachi ★ **FUSION-CROSSOVER** With a cool, crisp interior accented with Art Nouveau trimmings, this restaurant offers an interesting French menu that combines flavors of the West with Japanese and Asian ingredients, creations of its French-trained chef. Past choices have included starters like baked smoked salmon and asparagus with truffles and Thai-style spicy king crab cocktail with jellyfish; mains have included Mexican-style chicken curry, duck grilled with Japanese vegetables, and Chinese-style roasted quail with blueberry sauce. The hardest part of dining here? Limiting yourself to one meal—you just might have to come back.

2–2–6 Ginza. ☎ 03/3567-6281. Main dishes ¥2,400–¥3,200 (\$20–\$27); set dinner ¥5,000–¥10,000 (\$42–\$83); set lunch ¥2,500–¥5,000 (\$21–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 6–9:30pm (last order). Station: Yurakucho (5 min.). Between JR Yurakucho Station and Printemps department store.

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide by an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in appendix C showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, Rangetsu (below), refer to no. 6 in appendix C.

④ **Kushi Colza** ★ YAKITORI/KUSHIYAKI Kikkoman, the well-known producer of soy sauce, maintains a few restaurants, including this one. It serves yakitori and *kushiyaki* (grilled meats and vegetables on skewers), delicately seasoned with—what else?—Kikkoman soy sauce. Small, pleasant, and with an open counter where you can watch friendly chefs prepare your food, Kushi Colza has an English-language menu that lists three set dinners consisting of various skewered filets of beef, fish, eel, or pork, along with an appetizer, salad, soup, and dessert. There's also a special weekend and holiday set dinner for ¥3,000 (\$25). A la carte selections for skewered specialties average ¥350 to ¥800 (\$2.90–\$6.65) per skewer. My favorite accompaniment is the seasonal salad with soy sauce dressing. Lunch specials featuring beef or fish dishes are also available, though that menu is in Japanese only.

6–4–18 Ginza. ☎ 03/3571-8228. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥3,300 – ¥4,500 (\$27–\$37); set lunch ¥850 – ¥1,500 (\$7.10–\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–1:30pm and 5–10pm (last order); Sat 5–10pm. Closed holidays. Station: Hibiya (5 min.), Ginza (10 min.). Located on a small side street between and paralleling Sotobori Dori and the elevated JR Yamanote Line tracks, behind Sukiyabashi Hankyu department store; look for its sign, which says KUSHI & WINE.

⑤ **Ohmatsuya** ★★ *Finds* JAPANESE GRILL Enter this second-floor restaurant of a nondescript building and you're instantly back in time: After being greeted by waitresses clad in traditional countryside clothing, you'll find yourself enveloped in an old farmhouse atmosphere. (Part of the decor is from a 17th-century samurai house in northern Japan.) Even the style of cooking is traditional, as customers grill their own food over a hibachi. Sake, served in a length of bamboo, is drunk from bamboo cups. Dinner menus include such delicacies as grilled fish, skewered meat, and vegetables. A true find—and easy to find at that—located on Sony Street, the small side street behind the Sony Building.

6–5–8 Ginza. ☎ 03/3571-7053. Reservations required. Set dinner ¥4,800 – ¥9,000 (\$40–\$75), plus a ¥500 (\$4.15) table charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 5–10pm; Sat 4:30–9pm (last order). Closed holidays. Station: Ginza (3 min.). On the 2nd floor of the modern Ail D'Or Building behind the Sony Building on Sony St.

⑥ **Rangetsu** SUKIYAKI/SHABU-SHABU/KAISEKI/OBENTO This well-known Ginza restaurant has been dishing out sukiyaki, shabu-shabu, obento (traditional box meals), and steaks for 5 decades. It uses only Matsuzaka beef (bought whole and carved up by the chefs), which ranges from costlier fine-marbled beef to cheaper cuts with thick marbling. There are also various crab dishes (including a crab sukiyaki), kaiseki, sirloin steaks, and eel dishes. Especially good deals are the obento box meals, available day and night and offering a variety of small dishes, and the various set lunches served until 2:30pm. In the basement is a sake bar with more than 80 different kinds of sake from all over Japan, which you can also order with your meal.

3–5–8 Ginza. ☎ 03/3567-1021. Reservations recommended. Beef sukiyaki or shabu-shabu set meals from ¥7,000 (\$58) for dinner, ¥2,200 (\$18) for lunch; obento meals and mini-kaiseki ¥2,200 – ¥5,500 (\$18–\$46);

set lunch ¥1,200–¥3,800 (\$10–\$32). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Station: Ginza (3 min.). On Chuo Dori across from the Matsuya department store.

Zipangu VARIED JAPANESE Just outside the Ginza and located high in the sky—on the 47th floor of the new Caretta Shiodome Building with shimmering views over Tokyo Bay—this contemporary Japanese restaurant offers set meals for lunch that are difficult to describe—the constantly changing presentations border on nouvelle Japanese cuisine, with international influences. In the evenings, the stone-and-wood venue is more of a drinking bar, with an a la carte menu offering charcoal-grilled steak, yakitori, dim sum, and dishes that go well with wine. In any case, this is a great choice if you're visiting nearby Hama Rikyu Garden.

Caretta Shiodome, 1–8–1 Higashi-Shimbashi. ☎ 03/6215-8111. Reservations required. Main dishes (dinner only) ¥800–¥3,000 (\$6.65–\$25); set lunch ¥2,800–¥3,000 (\$23–\$25) Mon–Fri, ¥3,500–¥7,000 (\$29–\$58) weekends and holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–10pm (last order). Station: Shiodome (2 min.) or Shimbashi (5 min.).

INEXPENSIVE

⑦ **Atariya** ★ *Finds* YAKITORI Because it's open mostly at night and serves yakitori, this is technically a drinking establishment, but it also makes a good choice for inexpensive dining in Ginza, due in no small part to the welcoming, enthusiastic staff. You have your choice of table or counter seating on the first floor, while up on the second floor you take off your shoes and sit on split-reed mats. A set course will include most parts of the chicken, including the liver, gizzard, and skin, so you might wish to order a la carte for your favorites. Mine include asparagus wrapped in grilled pork, *tskune* (ground chicken meatballs on a skewer), and *shoniku* (chicken breast yakitori). The shop's name means "to be right on target, to score a bull's-eye," implying that a meal here is certain to bring good luck.

3–5–17 Ginza. ☎ 03/3564-0045. Yakitori set course ¥1,600 (\$13); individual skewers ¥150–¥300 (\$1.25–\$2.50). Snack charge ¥300 (\$2.50) per person. No credit cards. Tues–Sat 4:30–11pm. Station: Ginza (3 min.). Near Ginza 4-chome Crossing. Take the small side street that runs between Wako department store and Wako Annex; Atariya is on the 2nd block on the right.

Kids Family-Friendly Restaurants

Cafe Creperie Le Bretagne (p. 160) If sweet bean paste is not your child's idea of dessert, then perhaps the crepes at this casual establishment will do the trick, filled with fruit, chocolate, and other yummy concoctions.

Farm Grill (p. 149) If you're tired of paying for food your child just won't eat, let them compose their own meal at this extensive buffet offering salads, casseroles, meats, desserts, and other American fare, with children's prices to boot.

Hard Rock Cafe (p. 168) This internationally known establishment should pacify grumbling teenagers. They can munch on hamburgers, gaze at famous guitars and other rock 'n' roll memorabilia and, most importantly, buy that Hard Rock Cafe T-shirt.

Kua' Aina (p. 162) When your kids start asking for "real food," take them here for the best burgers in town.

Farm Grill (Value Kids AMERICAN) After all of Tokyo's cramped, tiny restaurants, what impresses you immediately about this place is the space—enough for 260 widely placed tables. And with its simple wood decor and (for Tokyo) reasonable prices, the second thing that will come to mind is that it's just like millions of casual restaurants in the U.S., which is what makes this restaurant so unusual—such a variety of American food in Japan is hard to come by, and at these prices, it's otherwise nonexistent outside hotels (sorry guys—you'll pay more than women do). Overflowing buffets, offering a variety of vegetables, casseroles, meats, and desserts, invite gluttony, but it's gluttony, thank goodness, with a time limit—90 minutes for lunch and 2 hours for dinner. Add ¥1,000 (\$8.35) to your meal, and you can drink all you want of a variety of beverages including wine, cocktails, and beer. The food is rather ordinary, but for hearty appetites on a budget, this may become a regular haunt.

GINZA NINE BUILDING 3, 8–5 GINZA. ☎ 03/5568-6156. Dinner buffet ¥2,500 (\$21) for men, ¥1,900 (\$16) for women, ¥1,200 (\$10) children 6–12, ¥500 (\$4.15) children 3–5; lunch buffet ¥1,000 (\$8.35) weekdays, ¥1,300 (\$10) Sat–Sun and holidays. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm and 5–11pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–4pm and 5–11pm. Station: Shimbashi (exit 1, 4 min.). On the 2nd floor of a building underneath the Shuto Expwy.

⑧ **Fukusuke** SUSHI In this basement full of cheap restaurants, called Ginza Palmy, walk all the way to the back (away from Harumi Dori) to this very inexpensive sushi bar, popular with area office workers. It has an exceptionally long counter, which makes it a good choice if you're looking for an empty seat during the noon-to-1pm rush (a branch of the same restaurant lies catty-corner). A counter outside displays various choices of set meals. The ¥800 (\$6.65) set lunch includes soup, various sushi, Japanese pickles, and tea.

TOSHIBA BUILDING B2, 5–2–1 GINZA. ☎ 03/3573-0471. Sushi à la carte ¥120–¥500 (\$1–\$4.15); set dinner ¥1,300–¥3,200 (\$11–\$27); set lunch ¥850–¥2,000 (\$7.10–\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Station: Ginza or Hibiya (4 min.). In the 2nd basement below the Sukiya-bashi Hankyu department store on Sotobori Dori at Sukiya-bashi Crossing.

Gonpachi (Find VARIED JAPANESE) Housed in a re-created *kura* (traditional Japanese warehouse) with exposed wooden beams, Gonpachi is a fun place to dine on a variety of dishes such as fish (like miso-glazed black cod), yakitori (like chicken or asparagus wrapped with bacon), sushi (evenings only), noodles, and more. It's actually one of four restaurants ensconced under a freeway in a nifty dining complex called **G-Zone**, all part of a chain belonging to the Global Dining group and offering Tex-Mex food in the rustic, cowboy-themed **Zest Cantina** (☎ 03/5524-3621); pizza and pasta in the Italian-themed **La Boheme** (☎ 03/5524-3616; see below for a review); and Southeast Asian fare in **Monsoon** (☎ 03/5524-3631). English-language menus, inexpensive food, friendly and polished staff, and late opening hours make each Global Dining restaurant a winner whether you're a Tokyo novice or a pro.

You'll find other Gonpachi at 1–13–11 Nishi Azabu (☎ 03/5771-0170) and on the fourth floor of Mediage on Odaiba (☎ 03/3599-4807), both open daily from 11:30am to 5am.

1–2–3 GINZA. ☎ 03/5524-3641. Main dishes ¥550–¥1,800 (\$4.60–\$15); set lunch ¥600–¥950 (\$5–\$7.90). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–5am. Station: Kyobashi (exit 3, 2 min.) or Ginza-Itchome (exit 7, 1 min.). On Chuo Dori, at the northern edge of Ginza.

La Boheme ITALIAN The food is passable, but what sets La Boheme apart is that it's open every day until 5am, making it a good bet for a late-night meal. I also like its huge, open kitchen in the middle of the room, surrounded by a

U-shaped counter that provides a ringside view of the action. The pasta ranges from lasagna to spaghetti Bolognese, along with some Japanese-style versions that include steamed breast of chicken with Japanese baby leek, spinach, and sesame oil; and fresh shrimp and basil with garlic, olive oil, and shimeji mushrooms.

You'll find other La Boheme restaurants in the Ginza at 1–2–3 Ginza (☎ 03/5524-3616); in Harajuku at 6–7–18 Jinguma (☎ 03/3400-3406) and 5–8–5 Jingumae (☎ 03/5467-5666); in Shibuya at 1–6–8 Jinnan (☎ 03/3477-0481); in Nishi Azabu at 2–25–18 Nishi Azabu (☎ 03/3407-1363); in Meguro at 4–19–17 Shirokanedai (☎ 03/3442-4488); and on the fourth floor of Mediage on Odaiba (☎ 03/3599-4801), all open daily from 11:30am to 5am.

6–4–1 Ginza. ☎ 03/3572-5005. Pizza and pasta ¥500–¥1,300 (\$4.15–\$11); set lunch ¥800–¥1,300 (\$6.65–\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–5am. Station: Hibiya (5 min.), Ginza (10 min.). Behind Sukiyaabashi Hankyu department store, on a corner.

⑨ **Shabusen** ★ *Value* SHABU-SHABU Located on the second floor of a fashion department store just a stone's throw from Ginza 4-chome Crossing (the Harumi Dori–Chuo Dori intersection), this is a fun restaurant where you can cook your own sukiyaki or shabu-shabu in a boiling pot as you sit at a round counter. It's also one of the few restaurants that caters to individual diners (shabu-shabu is usually shared by a group). Orders are shouted back and forth among the staff, service is rapid, and the place is lively. There's an English-language menu complete with cooking instructions, so it's user-friendly. The special shabu-shabu dinner for ¥3,950 (\$32), with appetizer, tomato ("super dressing") salad, beef, vegetables, noodles or rice porridge, and dessert, is enough for most voracious appetites.

Core Building 2F, 5–8–20 Ginza. ☎ 03/3571-1717. Set dinner ¥2,200–¥5,600 (\$18–\$47); set lunch ¥930–¥3,000 (\$7.75–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Station: Ginza (1 min.). On Chuo Dori next to the Nissan Building.

Yakitori Under the Tracks *Finds* YAKITORI This is not a restaurant but rather a place—underneath an arch of the elevated Yamanote railway tracks. Although there are several fancier establishments that occupy an entire arch, look for the one arch located about halfway between Harumi Dori and the Imperial Hotel Tower with a handful of tiny yakitori stands, each with a few tables and chairs. They cater to a rather boisterous working-class clientele, mainly men. The atmosphere, unsophisticated and dingy, harks back to prewar Japan, somewhat of an anomaly in the otherwise chic Ginza. Dining here can be quite an experience, and on my last visit, several stall owners enthusiastically beckoned me to join them.

Under the Yamanote Line tracks separating Ginza from Hibiya. No phone. Skewers ¥180–¥400 (\$1.50–\$3.35). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 5pm–midnight. Station: Hibiya or Yurakucho (3 min.).

AROUND TOKYO STATION

EXPENSIVE

Aux Amis Tokyo ★ FRENCH/JAPANESE This small, tony restaurant specializing in creative French cuisine is one of several perched on the top two floors of the newly remodeled Marunouchi Building (called *Maru Biru* by locals), on the Marunouchi (west) side of Tokyo Station. Sweeping views make it a dining hot spot (make reservations for one of the few coveted window seats), along with an extensive wine list and a changing French/Japanese menu that might include

such entrees as roast lamb with herbs of Provence, pork filet in a red-wine sauce, or fish of the day. It's also a great spot for lunch, but note that the rather bare dining room fails to absorb the constant chatter of this popular venue, making it rather noisy.

Marunouchi Building, 35th floor, 2-4-1 Marunouchi. ☎ 03/5220-4011. Main dishes ¥3,200–¥4,000 (\$27–\$33); set dinner ¥6,000–¥8,500 (\$50–\$71); set lunch ¥2,800–¥5,000 (\$23–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–3:30pm and 5:30–midnight (last order). Station: Tokyo Station (Marunouchi exit, 2 min.).

MODERATE

Central Mikuni's ★ VARIED JAPANESE/SUSHI/FUSION/INTERNATIONAL This is my top pick for a reasonably priced meal in Tokyo Station. Owned by the popular local chef Mikuni, it resembles an early-20th-century diner and is divided into themed sections flanking a central open kitchen. The conveyor-belt sushi counter, with dishes color-coded according to price, offers standards as well as original creations. There are also so-called “compartment” lunches (obento) featuring Asian contemporary or Japanese/French fusion cuisine, as well as inexpensive noodle and rice dishes served cafeteria style. Week-day Continental lunches start at ¥900 (\$7.50), while dinner early birds should take advantage of a set French meal for ¥5,500 (\$46) available 5 to 7pm. In short, this restaurant's offerings are so varied that you could dine here several days in a row, each time with a different dining experience.

Basement of Tokyo Station, 1-9-1 Marunouchi. ☎ 03/5218-5123. Main dishes ¥800–¥1,600 (\$6.65–\$13); sushi a la carte ¥150–¥650 (\$1.25–\$5.40) for lunch, ¥550–¥950 (\$4.60–\$7.90) for dinner; compartment lunch ¥2,000–¥3,500 (\$17–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–8pm (last order). Station: Nishimbashi (3 min.). Off Exitai Dori, between Chuo Dori and Showa Dori.

TSUKIJI

Since Tsukiji is home to the nation's largest wholesale fish market, it's not surprising that this area abounds in sushi and seafood restaurants. In addition to the recommendations here, don't neglect the many stalls in and around the market where you can eat everything from noodles to fresh sashimi.

MODERATE

⑩ **Tentake** FUGU People who really know their *fugu*, or blowfish, will tell you that the only proper time to eat it is October through March, when it's fresh. You can eat fugu year-round, however, and a good place to try this Japanese delicacy is Tentake, a place popular with the Tsukiji working crowd. An English-language menu lists fugu dishes such as tempura fugu; a complete fugu dinner with all the trimmings costs ¥9,000 (\$75). You can wash it all down with fugu sake. Otherwise, if you want suggestions, try the *fugu-chiri* for ¥3,800 (\$32), a do-it-yourself meal in which you cook raw blowfish, cabbage, dandelion leaves, and tofu in a pot of boiling water in front of you—this was more than I could eat, but you can make a complete meal of it by ordering the *fugu-chiri* course for ¥5,900 (\$49), which adds tempura, yakitori, and other dishes. If someone in your party doesn't like fugu, I'd recommend the crab set menu for ¥3,900 (\$32). And yes, that's fugu swimming in the fish tank.

Before you eat here, be sure you read about fugu in “Tips on Dining, Japanese Style” in chapter 2.

6-16-6 Tsukiji. ☎ 03/3541-3881. Fugu dishes ¥1,000–¥3,900 (\$8.35–\$32); fugu set courses ¥5,900–¥13,500 (\$49–\$112); set lunch ¥800–¥1,000 (\$6.65–\$8.35). AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–9:30pm (last order). Station: Tsukiji (7 min.). From the Harumi Dori/Shinohashi intersection, walk on Harumi Dori in the opposite direction of Ginza; the restaurant is on the left just before the bridge in a modern building.

INEXPENSIVE

⑪ **Edogin** SUSHI There are four Edogin sushi restaurants in Tsukiji, all located within walking distance of one another. Since they're close to the famous fish market, you can be sure that the fish will be fresh. There's nothing aesthetic about the main Edogin, first established about 80 years ago—the lights are bright, it's packed with the locals, and it's noisy and busy. It's particularly crowded during lunch- and dinnertime because the food is dependably good and plentiful. The menu is in Japanese only, but a glass case outside displays some of the set meals, with prices for most at ¥3,000 (\$25) or less. As an alternative, look at what the people around you are eating or, if it's lunchtime, order the *teishoku* (served until 2pm). The *nigiri-zushi teishoku* for ¥1,000 (\$8.35) offers a variety of sushi, along with soup and pickled vegetables; if you're really hungry, a more plentiful *nigiri-zushi teishoku* is available for ¥1,400 (\$12).

4–5–1 Tsukiji. ☎ 03/3543-4401. Set meal ¥1,000–¥3,500 (\$8.35–\$29); lunch *teishoku* ¥1,000–¥1,400 (\$8.35–\$12). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–9:30pm; Sun and holidays 11:30am–9pm. Station: Tsukiji (3 min.). Located near the Harumi and Shinohashi Dori intersection behind McDonald's; anyone in the neighborhood will be able to point you in the right direction.

⑫ **Sushi Dai** ★ SUSHI Located right in the Tsukiji Fish Market, this sushi bar boasts some of the freshest fish in town (and often a long line of people waiting to get in). The easiest thing to do is order the *seto*, a set sushi course that usually comes with tuna, eel, shrimp, and other morsels, plus six rolls of tuna and rice in seaweed (*onigiri*). If you can't stomach sushi for breakfast, order *tamago* (a slice of layer-fried omelet).

Tsukiji Fish Market. ☎ 03/3547-6797. Sushi a la carte ¥200–¥1,000 (\$1.65–\$8.35); sushi *seto* ¥1,500–¥3,800 (\$13–\$32). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 5am–2pm. Closed Wed (if the market is closed) and holidays. Station: Tsukiji (10 min.). Located in a row of barracks housing other restaurants and shops beside the covered market. Cross the bridge that leads to the market grounds, take a right, and then take your 1st left; to your right will be the barracks. Sushi Dai is in Building 6 in the 3rd alley (just past the mailbox), the 3rd shop on the right.

ASAKUSA

MODERATE

⑬ **Komagata Dojo** ★ Finds DOJO This is a restaurant very much out of the Edo Period. Following a tradition spanning 200 years and now in its sixth generation of owners, this old-style dining hall specializes in *dojo*, a tiny sardine-like river fish that translates as a “loach.” It's served in a variety of styles, from grilled to stewed. Easiest is to order one of the set meals, which includes a popular *dojo nabe*, cooked on a charcoal burner at your table (*dojo nabe* ordered a la carte costs ¥1,400/\$12). Otherwise, look around and order what someone else is eating. The dining area is simply one large room of tatami mats, with ground-level boards serving as tables and waitresses in traditional dress moving quietly about.

1–7–12 Komagata, Taito-ku. ☎ 03/3842-4001. Reservations recommended for dinner. Dojo dishes ¥1,200–¥1,400 (\$10–\$12); set meal ¥2,000–¥6,300 (\$17–\$53). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9pm. Station: Asakusa (3 min.). To reach the restaurant, walk south on Edo Dori (away from Kaminarimon Gate and Sensoji Temple); the restaurant—a large, old-fashioned wood house on a corner, with blue curtains at its door—is on the right side of the street, about a 5-min. walk from Kaminarimon Gate, past the UFJ Bank.

La Ranarita Azumabashi ★ ITALIAN The Asahi Beer Tower may not mean anything to you, but if I mention the building with the golden hops poised on top, you'll certainly know it when you see it (the building was designed by Philippe Starck). The Asahi Beer Tower is the high-rise beside the golden hops, looking like . . . a beer mug with foam on top? On the top floor (in the foam)

is this Italian restaurant with soaring walls and great views of Asakusa. It's a perfect perch from which to watch barges on the river or the sun set over Asakusa as you dine on everything from pizza or pasta (available also in half sizes) to grilled scampi. The set lunches, which begin at ¥1,200 (\$10) on weekdays and ¥1,500 (\$13) on weekends and holidays, include an antipasto, salad, a main dish, and coffee. If you want a ringside seat, make a reservation at least 3 days in advance or avoid the weekends.

Asahi Beer Tower (on the opposite side of the Sumida River from Sensoji Temple), 22nd floor, 1–23–1 Azumabashi. ☎ 03/5608-5277. Reservations recommended on weekends. Pizza ¥1,300–¥1,800 (\$11–\$15); pasta ¥650–¥1,900 (\$5.40–\$16); main dishes ¥1,900–¥2,800 (\$16–\$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2pm (last order) and 5–9pm (last order); Sun and holidays 11:30am–3pm and 4–8pm (last order). Station: Asakusa (4 min.).

①④ **Mugitoro** YAM/KAISEKI Founded about 60 years ago but now housed in a new building, this restaurant specializes in *tororo-imo* (yam) kaiseki and has a wide following among middle-aged Japanese women. Popular as a health food, the yams used here are imported from the mountains of Akita Prefecture and are featured in almost all the dishes. If you're on a budget or want a quick meal, come for the weekday lunch buffet offered until 1pm; it includes a main dish like fish or beef, yam in some form, a vegetable, soup, and rice. Simply deposit your ¥1,000 (\$8.35) into the pot on the table and help yourself.

2–2–4 Kaminarimon. ☎ 03/3842-1066. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥5,000–¥10,000 (\$42–\$83); set lunch ¥2,500–¥5,000 (\$21–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–9pm (last order); Sun and holidays 11am–9pm. Station: Asakusa (2 min.). From Sensoji Temple, walk south (with your back to Kaminarimon Gate) until you reach the 1st big intersection with the stoplight. Komagata-bashi Bridge will be to your left; Mugitoro is right beside the bridge on Edo Dori, next to a tiny temple and playground. Look for the big white lantern hanging outside.

INEXPENSIVE

①⑤ **China** ★ *Value* SHABU-SHABU/SUKIYAKI Established in 1880, China is an old sukiyaki restaurant with a new home in a seven-story building to the left of Kaminarimon Gate. The entrance to this place is open-fronted; all you'll see is a man waiting to take your shoes and a hostess in a kimono ready to lead you to one of the tatami-floored dining areas above. It offers very good shabu-shabu or sukiyaki set lunches for ¥2,300 (\$19), available until 4pm and including soup and side dishes. Otherwise, dinner set meals of shabu-shabu or sukiyaki, including rice and soup, begin at ¥2,500 (\$21). A display case out front shows a few options, but the very good English-language menu includes instructions, making this a good bet for the sukiyaki/shabu-shabu novice.

1–3–4 Asakusa. ☎ 03/3841-0010. Set meal ¥2,500–¥7,500 (\$21–\$63). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:45am–9:15pm; Sun and holidays 11:30am–9pm. Station: Asakusa (1 min.). On Kaminarimon Dori; located to the left of the Kaminarimon Gate if you stand facing Asakusa Kannon Temple (look for the sukiyaki sign).

①⑥ **Daikokuya** TEMPURA This simple tempura restaurant has been popular with the locals since 1887, and though it does not offer the most refined tempura, it has atmosphere, and its huge portions are legendary. It specializes in Edo-style tempura and *tendon* (tempura, usually ebi, or prawn, on a bowl of rice), prepared with sesame oil. Although there's no English-language menu, there are photographs of many of the dishes. An annex around the corner (next to Shigetsu Ryokan) handles the overflow crowd (and is open when the main shop is closed); a map at the door shows the way.

1–38–10 Asakusa. ☎ 03/3844-1111. Set courses ¥3,000–¥4,300 (\$25–\$36). No credit cards. Daily 11:10am–8:30pm. Closed irregularly once or twice a month. Station: Asakusa (5 min.). Off Nakamise Dori to

the west; take the small street that passes by the south side of Dempoin Temple (also spelled Demboin); the restaurant is at the 1st intersection on the left, a white corner building with a Japanese-style tiled roof and sliding front door.

Kamiya Bar **VARIED JAPANESE/WESTERN** This inexpensive restaurant, established in 1880 as the first Western bar in Japan, serves both Japanese and Western fare on its three floors. The first floor is the bar, popular with older, tobacco-smoking Japanese men. The second floor offers Western food of a sort (that is, the Japanese version of Western food), including fried chicken, smoked salmon, spaghetti, fried shrimp, and hamburger steak; the third floor serves Japanese food ranging from udon noodles and yakitori to tempura and sashimi. I personally prefer the third floor for both its food and its atmosphere. Although the menus are in Japanese only, extensive plastic-food display cases show set meals costing ¥1,500 to ¥3,500 (\$12–\$29). This is a very casual restaurant, very much a place for older locals, and can be quite noisy and crowded.

1–1–1 Asakusa. ☎ **03/3841-5400**. Main dishes ¥610–¥1,300 (\$5.10–\$11). No credit cards. Wed–Mon 11:30am–9:30pm (last order). Station: Asakusa (1 min.). Located on Kaminarimon Dori in a plain, brown-tiled building between Kaminarimon Gate and the Sumida River.

17 Namiki Yabusoba ★ **NOODLES** Asakusa's best-known noodle shop, founded in 1913, offers plain buckwheat noodles in cold or hot broth as well as more substantial tempura with noodles, all listed on an English-language menu. Seating is at tables or on tatami mats, and it's a small place, so you won't be able to linger if people are waiting.

2–11–9 Kaminarimon. ☎ **03/3841-1340**. Dishes ¥650–¥1,600 (\$5.40–\$13). No credit cards. Fri–Wed 11:30am–7:30pm. Station: Asakusa (2 min.). From Kaminarimon Gate, walk south (away from Sensoji Temple); Namiki is on the right side of the street in the 2nd block: a brown building with some bamboo trees, a small maple, and a stone lantern by the front door.

18 Sometaro ★ *Finds* **OKONOMIYAKI/YAKISOBA** This very atmospheric neighborhood restaurant specializes in *okonomiyaki*, a working-class meal that is basically a Japanese pancake filled with beef, pork, and vegetables, and prepared by the diners themselves as they sit on tatami at low tables inset with griddles. Realizing that some foreigners may be intimidated at having to cook an unfamiliar meal, this restaurant makes the process easier with an English-language menu complete with instructions. The busy but friendly staff can also help you get started. In addition to okonomiyaki and yakisoba (fried noodles with meat or vegetables), other do-it-yourself dishes are available. This is a fun, convivial way to enjoy a meal. Before entering the restaurant, be sure to deposit your shoes in the proffered plastic sacks by the door.

2–2–2 Nishi-Asakusa. ☎ **03/3844-9502**. Main dishes ¥560–¥700 (\$4.65–\$5.85); set courses ¥1,500–¥2,800 (\$13–\$23). No credit cards. Daily noon–10pm (last order). Station: Tawaramachi (2 min.) or Asakusa (5 min.). Just off Kokusai Dori, on the side street that runs between the Drum Museum and the police station, in the 2nd block on the right.

UENO EXPENSIVE

Ueno Seiyoken Grill ★ **CLASSIC FRENCH** Seiyoken opened in 1876 as one of Japan's first restaurants serving Western food. Now a nondescript building dating from the 1950s, it nonetheless remains the best place to eat in Ueno Park, serving pricey but quite good classic French cuisine, with a relaxing view of greenery outside its large windows and classical music playing softly in the background. The English-language menu includes seafood such as sole stuffed with shrimp in white-wine sauce and meat dishes ranging from filet mignon in

red-wine sauce to roast duck in green-pepper sauce. There's a varied selection of French wines as well as wines from Germany, California, and Australia. The Grill is located to the right as you enter the building and is not to be confused with the much cheaper utilitarian restaurant to the left.

In Ueno Park between Kiyomizu Temple and Toshogu Shrine. ☎ 03/3821-2181. Main dishes ¥3,000–¥7,000 (\$25–\$58); set dinner ¥5,000–¥12,000 (\$42–\$100); set lunch ¥4,000–¥5,000 (\$33–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–8pm (last order). Station: JR Ueno (6 min.).

MODERATE

①9 **Izu'ei** EEL Put aside all your prejudices about eels and head for this modern yet traditionally decorated multi-storied restaurant with a 260-year history dating back to the Edo Period and views of Shinobazu Pond. Since eels are grilled over charcoal, the Japanese place a lot of stock in the quality of the charcoal used, and this place boasts its own furnace in the mountains of Wakayama Prefecture, which is said to produce the best charcoal in Japan. *Unagi donburi* (rice with strips of eel on top), tempura, and sushi are available, as well as set meals. There's no English-language menu, but there is a display case outside, and the menu has some pictures.

2–12–22 Ueno. ☎ 03/3831-0954. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥1,500–¥3,000 (\$12–\$25); set meal ¥2,000–¥8,000 (\$17–\$67). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9:30pm (last order). Station: JR Ueno (3 min.). On Shinobazu Dori, across the street from Shinobazu Pond and the Shitamachi Museum, next to KFC Home Kitchen.

INEXPENSIVE

In addition to the restaurant below, try **Hard Rock Cafe Ueno**, 7–1–1 Ueno (☎ 03/5826-5821); see p. 168 for a review of the Hard Rock Cafe.

Mantra INDIAN Decorated in pink with etched mirrors and lots of brass, this tiny, spotless restaurant offers curries and tandoori at inexpensive prices. A good way for lone diners to try a variety of dishes is the all-you-can-eat lunch buffet served from 11am to 3pm or one of the meat or vegetarian set meals (*thali*).

Nagafuji Building Annex, 3rd floor, 4–9–6 Ueno. ☎ 03/3835-0818. Main dishes ¥980–¥1,200 (\$8.15–\$10); set meal ¥2,400–¥2,500 (\$20–\$21); lunch buffet ¥950 (\$7.90) weekdays, ¥1,270 (\$11) weekends and holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9:30pm (last order). Station: JR Ueno (2 min.). From the south end of Ueno Park, look for the modern Nagafuji Building on Chuo Dori; the annex is in the back, facing the north end of Ameyokocho shopping street.

SHINJUKU

In addition to the suggestions below, be sure to check out the restaurant floors of several buildings in Shinjuku, where you can find restaurants in all price categories serving a variety of Japanese and international cuisine, some with very good views. These include the 29th and 30th floors of the **N. S. Building** where, in addition to Hakkaku (described below), there are restaurants serving tempura, tonkatsu, teppanyaki, sushi, and Italian, German, and French food; the top four floors of the **Sumitomo Building** where, in addition to Donto (see review under “Hibiya & Ginza,” earlier in this chapter), you'll find more than 20 outlets offering everything from tempura to Chinese cuisine; and the 12th, 13th, and 14th floors of **Takashimaya Times Square** where, in addition to Kappoya Yaozen (described below), there are restaurants serving sushi, tonkatsu, noodles, and more.

VERY EXPENSIVE

New York Grill ★★ AMERICAN On the 52nd floor of Tokyo's most exclusive hotel, the New York Grill has remained *the* place to dine ever since its 1994 opening; some swear it's the most sophisticated restaurant in all of Japan.

Surrounded on four sides by glass, it features stunning views (especially at night), artwork by Valerio Adami, live jazz in the evenings, and a 1,600-bottle wine cellar (with an emphasis on California wines). The restaurant backs up its dramatic setting with generous portions of U.S. and Japanese steaks, seafood, and other fare ranging from delectable roast duck to rack of “certified organically raised” lamb, all prepared in an open kitchen. Both the set lunch and the weekend and holiday brunch are among the city’s best and most sumptuous (reservations required)—and are great options for those who don’t want to pawn their belongings to eat dinner here. I wouldn’t miss it.

Park Hyatt Hotel, 3-7-1-2 Nishi-Shinjuku. ☎ 03/5322-1234. Reservations required. Main dishes ¥4,000 – ¥7,800 (\$33–\$65); set lunch ¥4,600 (\$38); set dinner ¥10,000 – ¥15,000 (\$83–\$125); Sat–Sun and holiday brunch ¥5,800 (\$48). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–10:30pm. Station: Shinjuku (west exit, a 13-min. walk or a 5-min. free shuttle ride), Hatsudai on the Keio Line (7 min.), Tochomae on the Oedo Line (8 min.).

EXPENSIVE

②0 **Kakiden** ★★ KAISEKI Although it’s located on the eighth floor of a rather uninspiring building, Kakiden has a relaxing teahouse atmosphere with low chairs, shoji screens, bamboo trees, and soothing traditional Japanese music playing softly in the background. Sibling restaurant to one in Kyoto founded more than 260 years ago as a catering service for the elite, this kaiseki restaurant serves set meals that change with the seasons according to what’s fresh and available. An English-language menu lists the various set meals available, but probably the best thing to do is simply pick a meal to fit your budget. The set lunch is available until 3pm. Set dinners include box kaiseki starting at ¥5,000 (\$42), mini-kaiseki for ¥8,000 (\$67), and kaiseki courses ranging from ¥8,000 to ¥15,000 (\$67–\$125). Some of the more common dishes here include fish, seasonal vegetables, eggs, sashimi, shrimp, and mushrooms, but don’t worry if you can’t identify everything—I’ve found that even the Japanese don’t always know what they’re eating.

3-37-11 Shinjuku, 8th floor. ☎ 03/3352-5121. Reservations recommended for lunch. Set dinner ¥5,000 – ¥15,000 (\$42–\$125); set lunch ¥4,000 (\$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9pm (last order). Station: Shinjuku (east exit, 1 min.). On the east side of Shinjuku Station next to My City shopping complex.

MODERATE

Ban-Thai THAI One of Tokyo’s longest-running Thai restaurants and credited with introducing authentic Thai food to the Japanese, Ban-Thai still prepares excellent Thai fare, with 90 mouthwatering items listed on the menu. My favorites are the cold and spicy meat salad, the chicken soup with coconut and lemon grass, and the *pat Thai* (Thai fried rice). Note that set dinners are available only for parties of two or more; also, portions are not large, so if you order several portions and add beers, your tab can really climb.

1-23-14 Kabuki-cho, 3rd floor. ☎ 03/3207-0068. Main dishes ¥1,200 – ¥1,800 (\$10–\$15); set dinner ¥2,500 – ¥6,000 (\$21–\$50); set lunch ¥600 – ¥1,300 (\$5–\$11) weekdays, ¥1,600 – ¥2,200 (\$13–\$18) weekends and holidays. AE, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3pm and 5–11pm (last order); Sat–Sun and holidays 11:30am–11pm. Station: Shinjuku (east exit, 7 min.). In east Shinjuku in the seediest part of Kabuki-cho (don’t worry, the interior is nicer than the exterior) on a neon-lit pedestrian street connecting the Koma Building with Yasukuni Dori (look for the red neon archway and Pronto coffee shop), about halfway down, next to a game arcade.

②1 **Kappoya Yaozen** ★ *Value* KAISEKI Established 280 years ago, this Shinjuku branch in a department store has a rather plain interior, but the hostesses in kimono are friendly and the view of surrounding Shinjuku is pleasant.

It's also a very good choice for inexpensive kaiseki. A display case gives an approximation of some of the set meals available (they change with the seasons) and there's an English-language menu—or order simply according to your budget. This place is popular with older shoppers at the humongous Takashimaya Times Square who, probably exhausted, come here for a civilized break.

Takashimaya Times Sq., 14th floor, 5–24–2 Sendagaya. ☎ 03/5361-1872. Set meal ¥1,800–¥15,000 (\$15–\$125); set lunch ¥1,500 (\$13). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm (last order). Station: Shinjuku (south exit, 1 min.).

22 Tsunahachi TEMPURA Inside a small, old-fashioned, brown building in the heart of fashionable east Shinjuku is the main restaurant that has been serving tempura since 1923. Now there are more than 40 branches in Japan, including three in Shinjuku Station alone, and others in Ginza and Akasaka. Hours may vary, but most of the branches are open daily from 11:30am to 10pm. This is the largest outlet, and it has an English-language menu. The easiest option is to order the teishoku, the least expensive of which includes six pieces of tempura (shrimp, cuttlefish, white fish, bell pepper, and conger eel) and Japanese pickles. The most expensive teishoku has 10 pieces of tempura.

3–31–8 Shinjuku. ☎ 03/3352-1012. Reservations recommended. Tempura à la carte ¥450–¥1,200 (\$3.75–\$10); teishoku ¥1,100–¥1,800 (\$9.15–\$15). AE, V. Daily 11:15am–10pm. Station: Shinjuku San-chome (2 min.), Shinjuku (east exit, 5 min.). Off Shinjuku Dori on the side street that runs along the east side of Mitsukoshi department store.

INEXPENSIVE

Daikokuya *Value* SHABU-SHABU/SUKIYAKI/YAKINIKU If you're a big eater traveling on a budget, you won't want to miss dining here. This place offers only three main dishes—shabu-shabu, sukiyaki, and yakiniku—and serves up as much of it as you can consume in a 2-hour period. If you want to drink beer, whiskey, or shochu with your meal, add ¥1,000 (\$8.35) to the prices below, and you'll be able to drink to your heart's content as well. Popular with students and young office workers, Daikokuya is a rather strange place (its interior is kind of cavernous—maybe harking back to cave-age gluttony?) and, needless to say, can be quite rowdy.

Naka-Dai Building, 4th floor, 1–27–5 Kabuki-cho. ☎ 03/3202-7272. All-you-can-eat main dishes ¥1,750–¥2,250 (\$15–\$19). No credit cards. Mon–Thurs 5–11:30pm; Fri–Sun 3pm–midnight. Station: Shinjuku (east exit, 10 min.). In Kabuki-cho, 1 block west of Koma and across from Hotel Kent.

23 Hakkaku *★ Finds* VARIED JAPANESE/ROBATAYAKI This lively, crowded establishment has a lot going for it: a corner location in a skyscraper with expansive views over Yoyogi Park, inexpensive dishes and meals, and Kirin beer on tap. Although its decor and food resemble those of a bar, it's open for lunch, when only set meals are available; choose grilled fish, *hirekatsu* (breaded pork cutlet), or from the display case. Dinner offers a wider range of possibilities, including sashimi, grilled fish, *nikujaga* (a very tasty beef and potato stew), and salads. Yakitori, beginning at ¥300 (\$2.50) per skewer, includes asparagus wrapped in bacon and tsukune, two of my favorites. Since the menu is in Japanese only, perhaps you'll want to sit at the *robatayaki* counter, where you can point at various dishes, watch them be prepared on the open grill, and then receive them from a wooden paddle passed in your direction.

N. S. Building, 29th floor, 2–4–1 Nishi-Shinjuku. ☎ 03/3345-1848. Main dishes ¥500–¥850 (\$4.15–\$7.10); set lunch ¥750–¥850 (\$6.25–\$7.10). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5–10pm. Station: Tocho-mae (3 min.), Shinjuku (west exit, 8 min.).

HARAJUKU & AOYAMA

EXPENSIVE

Nobu ★★ NOUVELLE JAPANESE/PACIFIC RIM FUSION-CROSSOVER Sister restaurant to New York's Nobu, this classy, modern establishment is the place to see and be seen—and you can count on being seen since the staff yells “*Irashaimase!*” (“Welcome!”) the minute anyone is ushered into the dining room, noisily announcing each arrival. Jazz plays softly in the background, flowers sit atop each table, and the efficient staff keeps everything running smoothly. The food, beautifully presented and served one dish at a time, is a unique blend of Pacific Rim ingredients (not quite Japanese) with decidedly American/Latin influences. Sushi and sashimi are served, as well as sushi rolls like California rolls and soft-shell-crab rolls. Other dishes include yellowtail sashimi with jalapeño, scallop sashimi with Peruvian red-chile paste, and black cod with miso. If ordering is too much of a chore, you can leave your meal to the discretion of chef Matsuhisa by ordering the *omakase*, a complete chef's-choice dinner starting at ¥10,000 (\$83). Prices are less expensive at lunch. In fine weather, you can dine on an outdoor patio with a retractable roof.

6–10–17 Minami Aoyama. ☎ 03/5467-0022. Reservations recommended. Sushi and sashimi (per piece) ¥500–¥1,000 (\$4.15–\$10); tempura à la carte (per piece) ¥300–¥1,200 (\$2.50–\$10); set dinner ¥4,000–¥20,000 (\$33–\$167); set lunch ¥2,800–¥8,500 (\$23–\$71). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; daily 6–10pm (last order). Station: Shibuya or Omotesando (15 min.). On Roppongi Dori near Komazawa Dori and Kotto Dori.

Sabatini ★ ITALIAN This restaurant, with its Italian furniture and tableware and strolling musicians, seems as if it has been moved intact from the Old World. In fact, the only thing to remind you that you're in Tokyo is your Japanese waiter. The Italian family that owns Sabatini has had a restaurant in Rome for more than 40 years and family members take turns overseeing the Tokyo restaurant, so one of them is always here. The menu includes seafood, veal, steak, lamb, and a variety of vegetables; many of the ingredients, like olive oil, ham, salami, tomato sauce, and Parmesan, are flown in fresh from Italy. Naturally, there's a wide selection of Italian wines.

Suncrest Bldg., 2–13–5 Kita-Aoyama. ☎ 03/3402-3812. Reservations recommended for dinner. Pasta ¥1,800–¥3,200 (\$15–\$27); main dishes ¥2,100–¥6,500 (\$18–\$54); set dinner ¥15,000 (\$125); set lunch ¥3,500–¥5,000 (\$29–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–11pm. Station: Gaienmae (2 min.). On Aoyama Dori near Gaien-Nishi Dori.

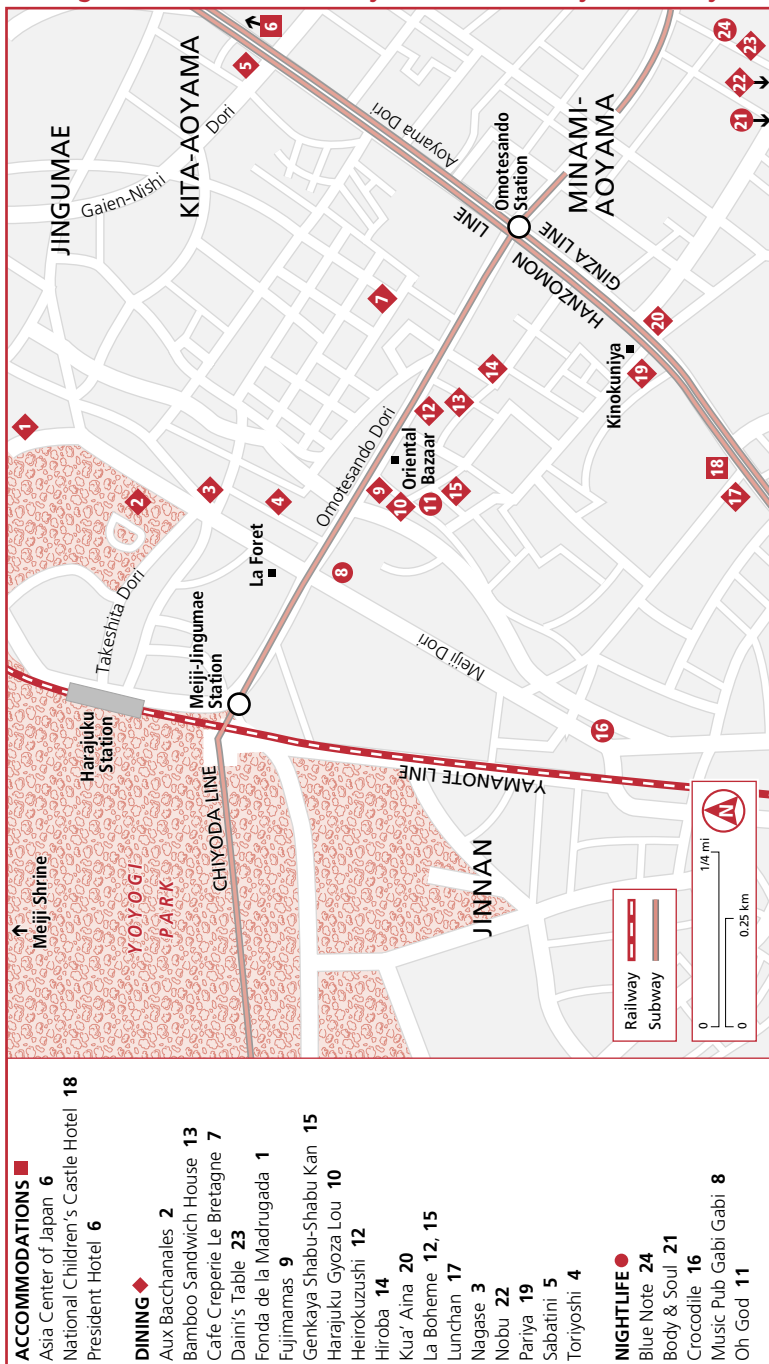
MODERATE

Aux Bacchanales FRENCH This is a real French sidewalk cafe, right in Tokyo's favorite people-watching neighborhood of Harajuku. Actually, it consists of two sections, both of which are packed on weekends: a brasserie with sandwiches and omelets priced at less than ¥650 (\$5.40), strong espresso, and good cheap wine (counter prices are slightly cheaper than at one of the sit-down tables, just like in France); and a restaurant with both outdoor and indoor seating offering such dishes as grilled lobster, steak tartare, *lapin à la moutarde*, and lamb with thyme. This is a perfect place for pretending you don't have a care in the world.

Palais France Building, 1–6–1 Jingumae (on Meiji Dori). ☎ 03/5474-0076. Main dishes ¥1,800–¥3,000 (\$15–\$25); set meal ¥3,800 (\$32). AE, DC, MC, V. Cafe daily 9am–10:30pm (last order); restaurant daily 6–10:30pm (last order). Station: Meiji-Jingumae (2 min.), Harajuku (7 min.). On Meiji Dori near Takeshita Dori.

Daini's Table ★★ NOUVELLE CHINESE This elegant Chinese restaurant, located next to the Blue Note jazz club off Kotto Dori, serves intriguing dishes that are nicely presented one dish at a time rather than all at once as in most

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Chinese restaurants. It offers both traditional dishes (roast Peking duck, boiled prawns with red-chile sauce, and hot-and-sour Peking-style soup) and more unusual combinations that change with the seasons. Everything I've had here has been delicious.

6-3-14 Minami Aoyama. ☎ **03/3407-0363**. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥1,800–¥3,800 (\$15–\$32); set dinner ¥4,000–¥12,000 (\$33–\$100); set lunch ¥1,500–¥2,500 (\$13–\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; daily 5:30–11pm (last order). Station: Omotesando (6 min.).

Fujimamas PACIFIC RIM/FUSION This airy restaurant employs lots of wood to impart a beach-shack atmosphere, but naturally at Tokyo prices. The culinary crossroad of cuisines presented on the changing English-language menu may include salads like a Thai-style Caesar salad with crispy calamari croutons or a minced Asian chicken salad in a crispy shell. Main dishes may include such tempting choices as grilled chicken on garlic mashed potatoes with bok choy and oyster barbecue sauce, New York strip steak with miso mashed potatoes and shiitake salad, and stir-fried roast duck with crispy vegetables. Lunch offers lighter fare, including sandwiches, stir fries, and curries.

6-3-2 Jingumae. ☎ **03/5485-2262**. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥1,200–¥2,600 (\$10–\$22); set lunch ¥1,000 (\$8.35). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri noon–3pm and 6–10pm; Sat–Sun and holidays noon–4pm and 6–10pm. Station: Meiji-Jingumae (2 min.) or Harajuku (5 min.). Off Omotesando Dori, on a side street near Kiddy Land.

Lunchan AMERICAN Good American food is the forte of this contemporary, open, and airy bistro, with a dinner menu that includes pasta, pizza, sandwiches, and meat entrees. Choose from among such dishes as pizza al forno with Italian smoked ham, fresh mushrooms, oregano, and hot peppers; meat loaf; grilled sea bass with sautéed vegetables and served with a caper berry sauce; or steak. A wide selection of lunch specials is offered, among them sandwiches with all the trimmings. Sunday brunch, which includes a glass of champagne and is served until 3pm, features breakfast treats like eggs Benedict and pancakes.

1-2-5 Shibuya. ☎ **03/5466-1398**. Reservations required for Sun brunch. Pizza ¥1,400–¥1,600 (\$12–\$13); main dishes ¥1,600–¥3,600 (\$13–\$30); set lunch ¥1,200–¥2,300 (\$10–\$19); Sun brunch ¥2,500 (\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–10pm; Sun 11am–9pm. Station: Omotesando or Shibuya (10 min.). Easy to find, halfway between Shibuya and Aoyama and just off Aoyama Dori on the side street south of the National Children's Castle.

INEXPENSIVE

In addition to the choices below, consider **La Boheme**, with two locations in Harajuku: 6-7-18 Jingumae (☎ **03/3400-3406**) and 5-8-5 Jingumae (☎ **03/5467-5666**) on Omotesando Dori, both serving pizza and pasta and open daily from 11:30am to 5am (p. 149).

Bamboo Sandwich House AMERICAN/SANDWICHES With a hip setting and an outdoor terrace, this restaurant offers 20 sandwich fillings on your choice of bread. The fillings can be a bit odd (unless you've been searching for shrimp and broccoli with anchovy sauce or a potato-and-meat-sauce gratin filling), but there are also more mundane choices like tuna or roast pork, and with great outdoor seating, even a weird sandwich seems okay here.

5-8-8 Jingumae. ☎ **03/3407-8427**. Sandwiches ¥350–¥700 (\$2.90–\$5.85). No credit cards. Daily 11am–10pm. Station: Omotesando or Meiji-Jingumae (5 min.), Harajuku (8 min.). Off Omotesando Dori on a side street that runs beside the Paul Stuart shop.

Cafe Creperie Le Bretagne *Kids* FRENCH/CREPES With an inviting open-fronted shop, posters of Brittany, natural wood and brick, and a French staff, this is *the* place for authentic buckwheat *galettes* and crepes filled with

yummy fruit or chocolate or such irresistible combinations as banana, chocolate, and rum. Kids will love this place, too.

4–9–8 Jingumae. ☎ 03/3478-7855. Crepes ¥700–¥1,200 (\$5.85–\$10); set lunch ¥1,400–¥1,600 (\$12–\$13). No credit cards. Tues–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11:30am–10pm (last order). Station: Omotesando. Off Omotesando Dori; take the side street opposite the Hanae Mori Building (the one between McDonald's and Ito Hospital, with a HARAJUKU sign above it), walk to the end of the block, and turn left.

Fonda de la Madrugada MEXICAN Serving what is probably Tokyo's most authentic Mexican food, this dark, basement restaurant has a cavernous main dining room, several small cozy offshoots, and a strolling mariachi band, making it seem like you're dining in the midst of a Mexican villa. Shrimp marinated in tequila, chicken mole, and soft-tortilla tacos served with chicken, fish, beef, or pork are just some of the items on the trilingual (Japanese/Spanish/English) menu, along with the requisite Mexican beers, tequila shots and shooters, margaritas, rum and vodka cocktails, and wine from Mexico, Chile, and Argentina.

2–33–12 Jingumae. ☎ 03/5410-6288. Main dishes ¥1,000–¥2,600 (\$8.35–\$22). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30pm–2am; Fri–Sat 5:30pm–5am. Station: Meiji-Jingumae (10 min.). From the Meiji Dori/Omotesando intersection, walk north on Meiji Dori (toward Shinjuku); it will be on your right after the pedestrian overpass.

24 **Genkaya Shabu-Shabu Kan** *Value* SHABU-SHABU/SUKIYAKI This casual restaurant with a rustic interior is one of the cheapest I've ever seen for shabu-shabu and sukiyaki. For ¥1,500 (\$13), you can have all the shabu-shabu or sukiyaki you can eat; for ¥1,700 (\$14) you can add vegetables. Thank goodness there's a 90-minute time limit; otherwise you might have to be airlifted out.

6–7–8 Jingumae. ☎ 03/3406-6500. All-you-can-eat shabu-shabu or sukiyaki ¥1,500–¥1,700 (\$13–\$14). No credit cards. Daily 5pm–2am. Station: Meiji-Jingumae (3 min.) or Harajuku (5 min.). From the Meiji/Omotesando Dori intersection, walk on Omotesando Dori toward Aoyama and take the 3rd right (just before Kiddy Land); it's at the end of this street, to the left.

25 **Harajuku Gyoza Lou** ★ GYOZA If you like gyoza (pork dumplings), you owe yourself a meal here. Unlike most greasy spoons that specialize in fast-food Chinese (and tend to be on the dingy side), this restaurant in the heart of Harajuku is hip yet unpretentious and draws a young crowd with its straightforward menu posted on the wall. Only four types of gyoza are offered: boiled (*sui-gyoza*) or fried (*yaki-gyoza*), and with or without garlic (*ninniku*). A few side dishes such as cucumber, boiled cabbage with vinegar, sprouts with a spicy meat sauce, and rice are available, as are beer and sake. A U-shaped counter encloses the open kitchen, giving diners something to watch as they chow down on the very good gyoza.

6–2–4 Jingumae. ☎ 03/3406-4743. Gyoza ¥290 (\$2.40) for a plate of 6. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:30am–4:30am; Sun and holidays 11:30am–11:30pm. Station: Meiji-Jingumae (3 min.) or Harajuku (5 min.). From the Meiji/Omotesando Dori intersection, walk on Omotesando Dori toward Aoyama and take the 3rd right (just before Kiddy Land); it's at the end of this street, on the right.

26 **Heirokekuzushi** SUSHI Bright (a bit too bright), clean, and modern, this is one of those fast-food sushi bars where plates of food are conducted along the counter on a conveyor belt. Customers help themselves to whatever strikes their fancy. To figure your bill, the cashier simply counts the number of plates you took from the conveyor belt: pink plates cost ¥120 (\$1), green ones ¥160 (\$1.35), blue ones ¥240 (\$2), black ones ¥350 (\$2.90), and gold ones ¥500 (\$4.15). There's a plastic display case of takeout sushi, which you might want to eat in nearby Yoyogi Park.

5–8–5 Jingumae. ☎ 03/3498-3968. Sushi ¥120 – ¥500 (\$1–\$4.15) each. No credit cards. Daily 11am–9pm. Station: Meiji-Jingumae (2 min.), Omotesando (5 min.). On Omotesando Dori close to the Oriental Bazaar.

Hiroba JAPANESE HEALTH FOOD/VEGETARIAN Located in the basement of the Crayon House, which specializes in Japanese children's books, this natural-food restaurant offers a buffet lunch of organic veggies, fish, brown rice, and other health foods. For dinner, only set meals are available. The dining hall is very simple (its atmosphere reminds me of a potluck supper in a church basement), and because of the upstairs bookstore, there are likely to be families here. Sharing the same phone, open hours, and cash register is **Home**, with waitress service and also offering wholesome meals using organic ingredients, including vegetarian choices. Set lunches here are ¥1,800 to ¥2,500 (\$15–\$21), with dinner entrees costing ¥1,800 to ¥2,200 (\$15–\$18).

Crayon House, 3–8–15 Kita Aoyama. ☎ 03/3406-6409. Lunch buffet ¥1,200 (\$10); set dinner ¥1,200 (\$10). No credit cards. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–10pm. Station: Omotesando (2 min.). Off Omotesando Dori on the side street to the right of the Hanae Mori Building.

Kua' Aina ★ *Kids* AMERICAN/HAMBURGERS/SANDWICHES How far will you go for a great burger? Quite simply, the best burgers in town make this Hawaiian import a smashing success. In fact, if you come at mealtime, you'll probably have to wait for a table at one of the upstairs, tiny dining rooms. Burgers come as third- and (whopping) half-pounders, and there are also sandwiches ranging from BLTs with avocado to roast beef to tuna. It's a good place for a carnivore fix. There's also a branch at 1–10–4 Shibuya (☎ 03/3409-3200), open daily 11am to 11pm.

5–10–21 Minami Aoyama. ☎ 03/3407-8001. Burgers and sandwiches ¥80 – ¥1,380 (\$4.85–\$12). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun 11am–10pm. Station: Omotesando (2 min.). On Aoyama Dori at its busy intersection with Kotto Dori, catty-corner from Kinokuniya grocery store.

Nagase ★★ *Finds* FRENCH This is another one of those casual neighborhood bistros offering great food at very reasonable prices that made its debut following the economic recession. Like most of the others, a cut in prices means a crowding of tables to accommodate as many diners as possible, but except for the most special of occasions, I'll gladly settle for cheaper prices over spaciousness. Set menus give a choice of a half-dozen main dishes, which might include the fish of the day, beef Burgundy, *confit de canard*, or *noisettes de lamb au thym*, along with a salad or side dish, bread, and coffee. My ¥1,000 (\$9) lunch was one of the best Western meals I've ever had in Japan at that price—a salad with boiled egg, chicken, mushrooms, and tomato, followed by white fish on mashed potatoes with an eggplant-tomato sauce subtly flavored with curry.

3–21–12 Jingumae. ☎ 03/3423-1925. Reservations required on weekends. Set dinner ¥2,300 and ¥3,500 (\$19 and \$29); set lunch ¥1,000 – ¥2,300 (\$8.35–\$19). No credit cards. Tues–Sat 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–9:30pm; Sun and holidays 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–8:30pm (last order). Station: Meiji-Jingumae (3 min.), Harajuku (8 min.). On the opposite side of Meiji Dori from Takeshita Dori, on a side street nicknamed Harajuku Dori; it's on the left side of the street, up on the 2nd floor.

Pariya ★ VARIED JAPANESE/INTERNATIONAL What a clever concept: Design a chic, airy restaurant sure to draw in the fashionable Aoyama crowd, and then keep 'em coming with set lunches that change weekly. Diners compose their own meals with choices of a main course, one side dish, a salad, *genmai* (unpolished brown rice) or *hakumai* (polished white rice), soup, and coffee and tea. Ethnic-influenced offerings have included grilled chicken, salmon, and sukiyaki beef, while side dishes have ranged from sweet potatoes to pasta. At dinner, the establishment is a combination bar/restaurant, with an

English-language menu listing salads (a standout is the Asian Caesar salad with oyster and poached egg, as well as the compose-your-own salads), noodle and rice dishes (recommended are the gyoza with leek or the pumpkin gnocchi with porcini cream sauce), pizza, and other fare that changes with the season. Sundays (11:30am–3pm) feature a brunch set with a choice of dishes for ¥1,300 (\$11).

3–12–14 Kita Aoyama. ☎ 03/3486-1316. Set lunch ¥1,100 (\$9.15) with genmai, ¥1,000 (\$8.35) with hakumai; dinner main courses ¥900–¥2,000 (\$7.50–\$17). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–3pm and 6–10pm (last order). Station: Omotesando (4 min.). On a side street off Aoyama Dori, past Kinokuniya grocery store.

②7 **Toriyoshi** VARIED JAPANESE/CHINESE Open and airy and decorated like a traditional warehouse (*kura*) with its gleaming woods, shoji screens, and tatami seating (with leg wells for those errant legs), this chain has an English-language menu listing a variety of Japanese and Asian pub fare, including salads, yakitori, tofu (I love the black sesame tofu, called *kuroi gomadofu*), various chicken dishes, *kimchi* (spicy Korean cabbage), and more. It's a good place for a convivial evening.

4–28–21 Jingumae. ☎ 03/3470-3901. Main dishes ¥580–¥1,500 (\$4.85–\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 5–11pm; Sat–Sun 4–11pm (last order). Station: Meiji-Jingumae (3 min.). From the Meiji Dori/Omotesando intersection, walk on Omotesando toward Aoyama and turn left at Wendy's; it's down this street, on the right side beside a willow tree.

ROPPONGI

Because Roppongi is such a popular nighttime hangout for young Tokyoites and foreigners, it boasts a large number of both Japanese and Western restaurants. To find the location of any of the Roppongi addresses below, stop by the tiny police station on Roppongi Crossing (Roppongi's main intersection of Roppongi Dori and Gaien-Higashi Dori), where you'll find a map of the area. If you still don't know where to go, ask one of the policemen.

About a 10-minute walk west of Roppongi (via Roppongi Dori in the direction of Shibuya) is another popular nighttime area—**Nishi Azabu**. Once primarily a residential neighborhood, Nishi Azabu has slowly changed over the years as it began absorbing the overflow of Roppongi. It has restaurants and bars yet remains mellower and much less crowded than Roppongi.

VERY EXPENSIVE

②8 **Inakaya** ★★ ROBOTAYAKI Whenever I'm playing hostess to foreign visitors in Tokyo, I always take them to this festive restaurant, and they've never been disappointed. Although tourist-oriented and overpriced, it's still great fun; the drama of the place alone is worth it. Customers sit at a long, U-shaped counter, on the other side of which are mountains of fresh vegetables, beef, and seafood. And in the middle of all that food, seated in front of a grill, are male chefs—ready to cook whatever you point to in the style of robotayaki. Orders are yelled out by your waiter and are repeated in unison by all the other waiters, resulting in ongoing, excited yelling. Sounds strange, I know, but it's actually a lot of fun. Food offerings may include yellowtail, red snapper, sole, king crab legs, giant shrimp, steak, meatballs, ginkgo nuts, potatoes, eggplant, and asparagus, all piled high in wicker baskets and ready for the grill. There's another nearby branch at 5–3–4 Roppongi (☎ 03/3408-5040), open daily 5pm to 5am.

4–10–11 Roppongi. ☎ 03/5775-1012. Meals average ¥12,000 (\$100). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Station: Roppongi (2 min.). Off Gaien-Higashi Dori on a side street opposite Ibis Hotel; from Roppongi Crossing, walk on Gaien-Higashi Dori in the direction of Aoyama and take the 2nd right.

②9 **Takamura** ★★ ★ *Finds* KAISEKI Takamura is a must for anyone who can afford it. Located on the edge of Roppongi, this wonderful 60-year-old

house, perched on a hill and hidden by greenery, is a peaceful oasis that time forgot. You'll dine in one of eight private tatami rooms, each one different, with charcoal hearths built into the floors, and windows looking out onto miniature gardens. Takamura has a very Japanese feeling, which intensifies proportionately with the arrival of your meal—seasonal kaiseki food arranged so artfully you almost hate to destroy it. Your pleasure increases, however, as you savor the various textures and flavors of the food. Specialties may include quail, sparrow, or duck, grilled on the hearth in your own private tatami room. Seating is on the floor, as it is in most traditional Japanese restaurants, but with leg wells. The price of dinner here usually averages about ¥27,000 to ¥33,000 (\$225–\$275) by the time you add drinks, tax, service charge, and table charge (¥2,000/\$17 per person). Dinner is for parties of two or more, while lunch is available only for parties of four or larger.

3–4–27 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3585-6600. Reservations required (1 day in advance for lunch, 1 week in advance for dinner, at which time you must order your meal). Set dinner ¥17,000, ¥20,000, and ¥25,000 (\$142, \$165, and \$208); set lunch ¥15,000, ¥17,000, and ¥20,000 (\$125, \$142, and \$165). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sat noon–3pm; Mon–Sat 5–10:30pm. Closed for lunch the day following a holiday, 1st week in Jan, and 1 week in mid-Aug. Station: Roppongi (4 min.). The restaurant has 2 entrances, each marked by a wooden gate with a little roof. The sign on the restaurant is in Japanese only, but look for the credit card signs. From Roppongi Crossing, take Roppongi Dori in the direction of Kasumigaseki; turn right on Yosezaka (you'll have to ask, since it's not clearly marked).

EXPENSIVE

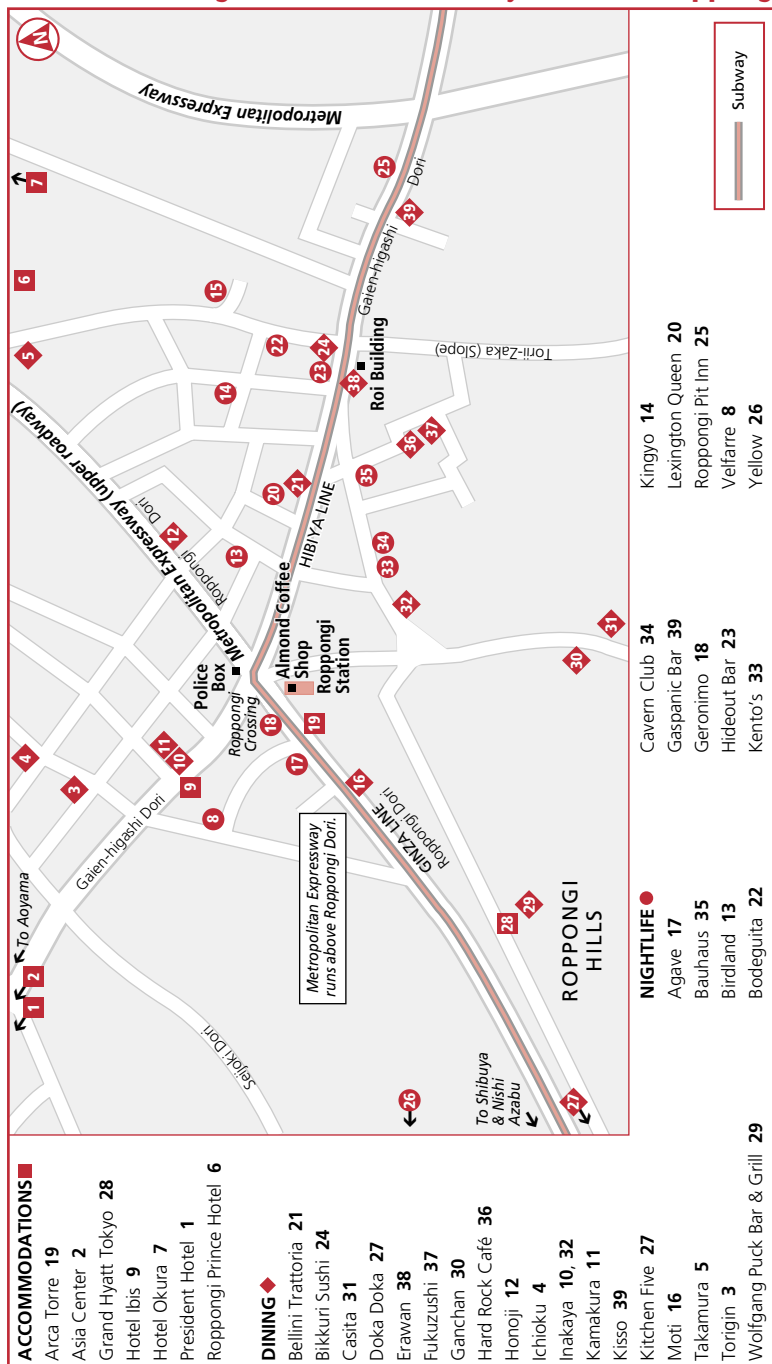
③⑩ **Fukuzushi** ★★ SUSHI This is one of Tokyo's classiest sushi bars, attracting a cosmopolitan crowd. Although it has a traditional entrance through a small courtyard with lighted lanterns and the sound of trickling water, the interior is slick and modern with bold colors of black and red. Some people swear it has the best sushi in Tokyo, although with 7,000 sushi bars in the city, I'd be hard-pressed to say which one is tops. Certainly, you can't go wrong here. Five different set lunches are available, which feature sushi, *chirashi-zushi* (assorted sashimi with rice), or eel as the main course. Dinners are more extensive, with the ¥8,000 (\$72) set meal consisting of salad, sashimi, steamed egg custard, grilled fish, sushi, miso soup, dessert, and coffee (set dinners require a minimum of orders by two people).

5–7–8 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3402-4116. Reservations recommended, especially for dinner. Set dinner ¥6,000–¥8,000 (\$50–\$67); set lunch ¥2,500–¥4,500 (\$21–\$38). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–11pm; holidays 5:30–10pm (last order). Station: Roppongi (4 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk toward Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori, turning right after McDonald's and left in front of the Hard Rock Cafe.

Kisso ★★ KAISEKI There should be more places like this in Tokyo. I love eating here because Kisso represents all that is best about modern Japan—understated elegance and a successful marriage between the contemporary and the traditional. This thoroughly modern establishment sells Japanese gourmet cookware, including expensive ceramics, utensils, and lacquerware of contemporary design, in its shop on the third floor. The restaurant, in the basement of this interesting building filled with shops dedicated to the best in interior design, is simple but elegant, with heavy tables, sprigs of flowers, and soft lighting. The food is kaiseki and comes only in set meals, served (as you might guess) on beautifully lacquered bowls and trays and ceramic plates. Before or after your meal, be sure to wander through the shops.

Axis Building, 5–17–1 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3582-4191. Reservations recommended for dinner. Set dinner ¥3,500–¥15,000 (\$29–\$125); set lunch ¥1,200–¥5,000 (\$10–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2pm; Mon–Fri 5:30–9pm (last order); Sat 5:30–8pm (last order). Closed holidays. Station: Roppongi (5 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk toward Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori; the Axis Building will be on your right.

Nightlife & Where to Stay & Dine in Roppongi



MODERATE

Casita ★★☆☆ *Finds* PACIFIC RIM/FUSION-CROSSOVER One of the reasons I'm a great fan of Casita is that I feel truly pampered here. Who wouldn't, with a staff that proffers flashlights to the aged among us who have difficulty reading menus in dim light, stands ready to carry out every whim and, on chilly nights, tucks us in under electric blankets so we can enjoy after-dinner drinks on the deck before we head on over to the massage chairs? Casita aims to please, carving its own niche in Tokyo's fiercely competitive market by creating a tropical, resortlike atmosphere bolstered by great service, an airy dining room with palm trees and orchids on every table, and a year-round outdoor deck that's heated in winter and covered when it rains. Of course, none of that matters if the food falls short, but Casita turns out dishes that border on awesome, whether it's the Caesar salad with serious shavings of Parmesan, the caramelized foie gras with sweet-and-spicy chutney, the Asian roasted lobster, or the tuna roast flavored with black truffle and port-wine sauce. Who wouldn't be a fan?

54–10–25 Roppongi, 3rd floor. ☎ 03/5414-3190. Reservations highly recommended. Main dishes ¥2,000 – ¥3,600 (\$17–\$30). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 6pm–2am; Fri–Sat 6pm–4am (to 4am daily in summer). Station: Roppongi (7 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, take the small side street going downhill to the left of the Almond Coffee Shop. Casita is at the bottom of the hill on the left.

Doka Doka ★ NOUVELLE JAPANESE Opened in 1996, this restaurant/drinking establishment is a curious blend of the traditional and quirky, but it's done so well that the atmosphere intrigues rather than annoys. The traditional interior features mud-textured walls, heavy wood beams, and an open coal fire in the middle of the small first floor. Balcony seating upstairs rings a hand-carved balustrade and antique shoji dating from the early Showa Period (retrieved from a former geisha house in the Yoshiwara red-light district of yore). Soft jazz plays in the background, and seating is on an odd assortment of tiny chairs imported from Africa, Tibet, Bali, and other exotic lands. The food, on a handwritten Japanese-only menu (ask the manager for explanations), changes every 3 months according to what's fresh and available. Past dishes have included duck with miso salad, fish nabe, and an excellent chicken cassoulet. The bread is homemade. Expect to spend at least ¥5,000 (\$42) per person.

4–2–14 Nishi Azabu. ☎ 03/3406-1681. Reservations recommended on weekends. Main dishes ¥1,000 – ¥3,200 (\$8.35–\$27); set dinner ¥4,500 – ¥5,500 (\$38–\$46). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 6pm–2am; Fri–Sat 6pm–3am (last order). Closed holidays. Station: Hiroo (7 min.), Roppongi (15 min.). On a small side street across Gaien-Nishi Dori from the gas station, next to Kitchen Five (see below).

Erawan ★★☆☆ THAI Perched 13 floors above the Roppongi madness and offering cool, aloof views on three sides (ask for the Tokyo Tower side), this restaurant is massive but does a good job of sectioning the floor space into intimate dining areas and re-creating its native homeland with dark gleaming woods, wood carvings, plants, bamboo screens, and a smiling Thai staff. The food lives up to its reputation, with plenty of seafood and curry selections, including deep-fried prawns with chile sauce, steamed white fish with Thai sauce, and red curry with beef and eggplant.

Roi Building, 13th floor, 5–5–1 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3404-5741. Main dishes ¥1,200 – ¥2,000 (\$10–\$17); set dinner ¥3,500 – ¥4,500 (\$29–\$38). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–11:30pm. Station: Roppongi (3 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, on the right side of Gaien-Higashi Dori (the road leading to Tokyo Tower), just past McDonald's.

Wolfgang Puck Bar & Grill ★★☆☆ AMERICAN/FUSION-CROSSOVER This stylishly chic restaurant, launched in 2003 in Roppongi Hills, is under the direct supervision of world-famous Austrian-born Wolfgang Puck, the creator of

Californian/fusion cuisine. Over the next 10 years, Puck plans to open a mind-boggling 100 more outlets in Japan (including lower-priced cafes focusing on pizzas, sandwiches, and salads). This location offers East-meets-West fusion cuisine, with dinner featuring such dishes as pan-seared swordfish with coconut curry and Basmati rice or marinated honey-soy lamb chop with stir-fried Californian vegetables in a mint sauce. Lunch is more casual, with everything from grilled hamburgers to barbecued chicken pizza with cilantro and red onion.

Hollywood Plaza, 2nd floor, 6-4-1 Roppongi. ☎ **03/5786-9630**. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥2,500–¥3,200 (\$21–\$27). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 5–10pm (last order). Station: Roppongi (Roppongi Hills exit, 1 min.).

INEXPENSIVE

In addition to the recommendations below, **La Boheme**, 2-25-18 Nishi Azabu (☎ **03/3407-1363**), serving pizza and pasta, and **Gonpachi**, 1-13-11 Nishi Azabu (☎ **03/5771-0180**), serving Japanese food, are good places for inexpensive fare (see “Ginza & Hibiya,” for a review of both).

Bellini Trattoria PIZZA/PASTA With an open-fronted facade giving close-up views of Roppongi’s never-ending parade of humanity, an open kitchen turning out inexpensive pizzas and pasta, and an easy-to-find location, this casual eatery is a no-brainer for an inexpensive meal in Roppongi. Unfortunately for nonsmokers, the best, upfront tables are reserved for smokers while nonsmokers are relegated to the back room. Good for smaller appetites: Half-size pizzas are available.

3-14-12 Roppongi. ☎ **03/3470-5650**. Pizza and pasta ¥1,100–¥1,800 (\$9.15–\$15); set lunch (Mon–Fri only) ¥1,000–¥1,800 (\$8.35–\$15). AE, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–3:30pm and 6–10pm; Fri 11:30am–3:30pm and 6pm–3am; Sat 11:30am–3am; Sun 11:30am–10pm (last order). Station: Roppongi (2 min.). On the left-hand side of Gaien-Higashi Dori (the road leading to Tokyo Tower).

③① **Bikkuri Sushi** *Value* SUSHI This is one of the cheapest places to eat in this popular nightlife district. Plates of sushi move along a conveyor belt past customers seated at the counter, who simply help themselves to whichever plates strike their fancy; this makes dining a cinch since it’s not necessary to know the name of anything. The white plates of sushi are all priced at ¥130 (\$1.10), while the colored dishes run ¥250 to ¥650 (\$2.10–\$5.40). Your bill is tallied according to the number of plates you’ve taken.

3-14-9 Roppongi. ☎ **03/3403-1489**. Dishes ¥130–¥650 (\$1.10–\$5.40). No credit cards. Daily 11am–5am. Station: Roppongi (3 min.). On the left-hand side of Gaien-Higashi Dori (the road leading to Tokyo Tower), across the street from the Roi Building.

③② **Ganchan** *★* YAKITORI This is one of my favorite yakitori-ya, and I’ve spent many a night here. Small and intimate, it’s owned by a friendly and entertaining man who can’t speak English worth a darn but keeps trying with the help of a worn-out Japanese-English dictionary he keeps behind the counter. His staff is young and fun loving. There’s an eclectic cassette collection—I never know whether to expect Japanese pop tunes or American oldies. Seating is along just one counter with room for only a dozen or so people. Though there’s an English-language menu, it’s easiest to order the yakitori *seto*, a set meal that comes with salad and soup and eight skewers of such items as chicken, beef, meatballs, green peppers, and asparagus with rolled bacon. Be aware that there’s a table charge of ¥600 (\$5) per person, which includes an appetizer.

6-8-23 Roppongi. ☎ **03/3478-0092**. Yakitori skewers ¥200–¥400 (\$1.65–\$3.35); yakitori set meal ¥2,500 (\$21). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5:30pm–1:30am; Sun and holidays 5:30pm–midnight. Station: Roppongi (7 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, take the small street going downhill to the left of the Almond Coffee Shop; Ganchan is at the bottom of the hill on the right.

Hard Rock Cafe *(Kids)* AMERICAN Founded by two American ex-patriates in London in 1971, Hard Rock Cafe now has half a dozen locations in Japan; this was the first. If you have disgruntled teenagers in tow, bring them to this world-famous hamburger joint dedicated to rock 'n' roll to ogle the memorabilia on the walls, chow down on a burger, and look over the T-shirts for sale. In addition to hamburgers, the menu includes salads, sandwiches, steak, barbecued ribs, barbecued chicken, a fish of the day, and fajitas. The music, by the way, is loud.

A branch is now also open in Ueno at 7-1-1 Ueno (☎ 03/5826-5821).

5-4-20 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3408-7018. Main dishes ¥1,280-¥3,000 (\$11-\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon-Thurs 11:30am-2am; Fri-Sat 11:30am-4am; Sun and holidays 11:30am-11:30pm. Station: Roppongi (3 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk on Gaien-Higashi Dori toward Tokyo Tower and take a right at McDonald's.

(33) Honoji ★ *(Finds)* JAPANESE A plain wooden facade and a no-nonsense interior of concrete walls with wire-mesh screens set the mood for what this restaurant offers: good, home-style Japanese cooking, along with some Japanese interpretations of Western food. Although it looks small at first glance (an open kitchen takes up half the space), there are back-room nooks and crannies that give diners a sense of privacy as they enjoy grilled fish, sashimi, yakitori, grilled eggplant with miso, deep-fried tofu, and a few Western dishes like creamed spinach and scallop gratin. It serves the kinds of food offered by neighborhood *nomiya* (drinking establishments) all over Japan, which isn't exactly the kind of fare you'd expect to find in trendy Roppongi. Still, the crowds that wait at the door, especially on weekend nights, attest to its success. There's an English-language menu, but probably the best deal is the set dinner, which includes sashimi, a main dish such as grilled fish, seasonal vegetables, and several other side dishes. Otherwise, expect to spend ¥3,000 to ¥3,500 (\$27-\$32) per person; note that there's a dinner table charge of ¥450 (\$3.75) per person at night. The lunch *teishoku*, available for ¥900 (\$7.50), and the only item offered for lunch, draws Japanese from all walks of life.

3-4-33 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3588-1065. Main dishes ¥400-¥680 (\$3.35-\$5.65); set dinner ¥3,000 (\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon-Fri 11:30am-1:30pm (last order); Mon-Sat 5:30-11pm (last order 10:15pm). Station: Roppongi (3 min.). On the right side of Roppongi Dori as you walk from Roppongi Crossing in the direction of Akasaka.

(34) Ichioku ★ JAPANESE ORIGINALS This is one of my favorite restaurants in Tokyo for casual dining. It's a tiny, cozy place with only eight tables, and you fill out your order yourself by checking off the items you want on the English-language menu (complete with pictures) you're given. The food, featuring organically grown vegetables, can best be called Japanese nouvelle cooking, with original creations offered at very reasonable prices. There's tuna and ginger sauté, mushroom sauté, shrimp spring rolls, Thai curry, asparagus salad, fried potatoes, and a dish of crumbled radish and tiny fish. I recommend the tofu steak (fried tofu and flakes of dried fish) as well as the cheese gyoza (a fried pork dumpling with cheese melted on it).

4-4-5 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3405-9891. Main dishes ¥350-¥2,950 (\$2.90-\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon-Fri 11:30am-2pm and 5pm-midnight (last order); Sat 5pm-midnight; holidays 5-10:30pm. Station: Roppongi (4 min.). On a side street in the neighborhood behind the police station; look for the Rastafarian colors and a yin/yang sign.

Kamakura YAKITORI Much more refined than most yakitori-ya, this basement establishment is decorated with paper lanterns and sprigs of fake but cheerful spring blossoms, with traditional koto music playing softly in the background. The English-language menu lists yakitori set courses, and a la carte skewers include those with shrimp, meatballs, ginkgo, squid, eggplant, and mushrooms.

Finds Dining Under the Stars at Hanezawa Garden

There's no finer place to enjoy balmy summer nights than the outdoor **Terrace Restaurant at Hanezawa Garden**, 3-21-15 Hiroo (☎ 03/3400-2013; open Apr to mid-Oct 11:30am-1:30pm and 5:30-9:30pm; station: Ebisu, Omotesando, or Shibuya, then take a taxi), spread under trees on a raised deck lit by tiki torches. In inclement weather, diners are sheltered by a retractable awning and warmed by outdoor heaters (though I must admit that's not nearly as romantic as dining under the stars). In addition to Kirin beer, wine, and cocktails, it offers a limited English-language menu that includes Vietnamese tuna spring rolls, fried shrimp with mayonnaise, Caesar salad, *edamame* (steamed soy beans), *kimchi*, and a do-it-yourself barbecue of seafood, beef, sausage, or vegetables. I usually opt for one of the set meals, which range in price from ¥3,500 to ¥5,000 (\$29-\$42) and include various meats and vegetables for do-it-yourself barbecuing, plus side dishes.

4-10-11 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3405-4377. Yakitori skewers ¥180-¥280 (\$1.50-\$2.35); set dinner ¥2,300-¥4,300 (\$19-\$36). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon-Sat 5pm-midnight. Station: Roppongi (2 min.). Off Gaien-Higashi Dori on a side street opposite Ibis Hotel; from Roppongi Crossing, walk on Gaien-Higashi Dori in the direction of Aoyama and take the 2nd right.

Kitchen Five ★★  **Finds** MEDITERRANEAN/ETHNIC If it's true that cooking with love is the best spice, then perhaps that's why Yuko Kobayashi's 15-year-old, 16-seat restaurant is so popular. She goes to market every morning to fetch ingredients for a dozen main dishes, which may include stuffed eggplant, moussaka, and various other casseroles and curries. Every summer Kobayashi goes off to search for recipes in Sicily, South America, northern Africa, and other countries that feature garlic, tomatoes, and olive oil in their cuisines. The love for what she does shines in her eyes as she cooks, serves, and walks you through the menu of daily dishes displayed. **A word of warning:** The food is so delicious, it's tempting to over-order. This restaurant is highly recommended.

4-2-15 Nishi Azabu. ☎ 03/3409-8835. Dishes ¥1,300-¥1,900 (\$11-\$16). MC, V. Tues-Sat 6-9:45pm (last order). Closed holidays, Golden Week, and late July to early Sept. Station: Hiroo (7 min.), Roppongi (15 min.). Opposite Gaien-Nishi Dori from the gas station, down a side street.

Moti ★ **INDIAN** This is my favorite Indian restaurant in town. Dishes include vegetable curries, chicken and mutton curries (I usually opt for the sag mutton—lamb with spinach), and tandoori chicken. Set lunches, served until 2:30pm, offer a choice of vegetable, chicken, or mutton curry along with Indian bread (*naan*) and tea or coffee.

There are two branches of Moti in Akasaka: on the second floor of the Akasaka Floral Plaza, 3-8-8 Akasaka (☎ 03/3582-3620); and on the third floor of the Kinpa Building, 2-14-31 Akasaka (☎ 03/3584-6640).

6-2-35 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3479-1939. Main dishes ¥1,350-¥1,500 (\$11-\$13); set dinner ¥2,600-¥3,000 (\$22-\$25); set lunch ¥950-¥1,350 (\$7.90-\$11) Mon-Sat, ¥1,250-¥1,650 (\$10-\$14) Sun and holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon-Sat 11:30am-10pm (last order); Sun and holidays noon-10pm. Station: Roppongi (3 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk toward Shibuya on Roppongi Dori; it will be on the left.

③5 **Torigin** YAKITORI/RICE CASSEROLES Part of a chain of yakitori establishments, this no-frills place is typical of the smaller Japanese restaurants

all over the country patronized by the country's salarymen, who stop off for a drink and a bite to eat before boarding the commuter trains for home. An English-language menu includes skewers of grilled chicken, ginkgo nuts, green peppers, quail eggs, and asparagus with rolled bacon, as well as various *kamameshi* (rice casseroles cooked and served in their own little pots and topped with chicken, bamboo shoots, mushrooms, crab, salmon, or shrimp).

4–12–6 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3403-5829. Yakitori skewers ¥140–¥250 (\$1.15–\$2.10); kamameshi ¥800–¥1,200 (\$6.65–\$10). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–10:30pm. Station: Roppongi (2 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, take Gaien-Higashi Dori in the direction of Akasaka and then take the 3rd right.

AKASAKA

VERY EXPENSIVE

La Tour d'Argent ★★ CLASSIC FRENCH Here's the place to dine if you're celebrating a very special occasion, are on a hefty expense account, or fancy yourself a jet-setter. Opened in 1984, La Tour d'Argent is the authentic sister to the one in Paris, which opened back in 1582 and was visited twice by Japan's former emperor, Hirohito. Entrance to the Tokyo restaurant is through an impressive hallway with a plush interior and displays of tableware used in the Paris establishment throughout the centuries. The dining hall looks like an elegant Parisian drawing room. The service is superb, and the food is excellent. The specialty here is roast duckling—it meets its untimely end at the age of 3 weeks and is flown to Japan from Brittany. Other dishes on the menu, which changes seasonally, may include lobster, roasted quail, or Kobe beef sirloin.

Hotel New Otani, 4–1 Kioi-cho. ☎ 03/3239-3111. Reservations required. Main dishes ¥6,500–¥13,000 (\$54–\$108). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 5:30–10:30pm (last reservation accepted for 8:30pm). Station: Akasaka-mitsuke or Nagatacho (3 min.).

Sekishin Tei ★★ TEPPANYAKI Nestled in the New Otani's 400-year-old garden (which is the reason this is the hotel's most popular restaurant), this glass-enclosed teppanyaki pavilion has an English-language menu for Kobe beef, fish, lobster, and vegetables, cooked on a grill right in front of you. If you order a salad, try the soy sauce dressing; it's delicious. You'll eat surrounded by peaceful views, making this place a good lunchtime choice.

Hotel New Otani, 4–1 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku. ☎ 03/3238-0024. Reservations required. Set dinner ¥13,000–¥18,000 (\$108–\$150); set lunch ¥3,500–¥6,000 (\$29–\$50). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm and 6–9pm; Sat–Sun and holidays 11:30am–3pm and 6–9pm. Station: Nagatacho or Akasaka-mitsuke (3 min.).

EXPENSIVE

③⑥ **Hayashi** ★★ ★ Finds JAPANESE GRILL/RICE CASSEROLES One of the most delightful old-time restaurants I've been to in Tokyo, this cozy, rustic-looking place serves home-style country cooking and specializes in grilled food that you prepare yourself over your own square hibachi. Altogether, there are eight grills in this small restaurant, some of them surrounded by tatami mats and some by wooden stools or chairs. As the evening wears on, the one-room main dining areas can get quite smoky, but somehow that just adds to the ambience. Other nice touches are the big gourds and memorabilia hanging about and the waiters in traditional baggy pants. Hayashi serves four set menus, which change with the seasons. The ¥6,000 (\$50) meal—which will probably end up being closer to ¥8,000 (\$67) by the time you add drinks, tax, and service charge—may include such items as sashimi and vegetables, chicken, scallops, and ginkgo nuts, which you grill yourself. At lunch, only *oyako donburi* is served: Literally “parent and child,” it's a simple rice dish topped with egg and chicken.

Sanno Kaikan Building, 4th floor, 2-14-1 Akasaka. ☎ 03/3582-4078. Reservations required for dinner. Set dinner ¥4,000, ¥6,000, ¥8,000, and ¥10,000 (\$33, \$50, \$67, and \$83); set lunch ¥900 (\$7.50). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–11pm; Sat 5:30–11pm. Closed holidays. Station: Akasaka-mitsuke (exit 2, 1 min.). Just south of Misuji Dori on the 3rd and 4th floors of a nondescript, improbable-looking building.

(37) Zakuro ★ SHABU-SHABU/SUKIYAKI Zakuro, a local chain, is one of several restaurants claiming to have introduced shabu-shabu in Japan. It serves Kobe beef and is decorated with folk art (including works by famous Japanese artists Shiko Munakata and Shoji Hamada). Friendly, kimono-clad hostesses serve shabu-shabu, sukiyaki, tempura, and teriyaki beef, all available as set dinners with various side dishes. At lunch there are set meals of tempura, sashimi, sukiyaki, and teriyaki beef. Since Zakuro (which means “pomegranate”) has an English-language menu, ordering is no problem, which means it’s a popular place to bring visiting foreign clients.

TBS Kaikan Building basement, 5-3-3 Akasaka. ☎ 03/3582-6841. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥6,800 – ¥16,000 (\$57–\$133); set lunch ¥1,500 – ¥3,800 (\$13–\$32). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm (last order). Station: Akasaka (TBS exit, 1 min.).

MODERATE

Blue Sky CHINESE Located on the 17th floor of the New Otani’s main building with great views of the city, this revolving restaurant provides panoramic views and all-you-can eat buffets, primarily Chinese. The food, tasty and varied, consists of approximately 40 different items for lunch and 50 for dinner, and includes spicy Szechuan cuisine, dim sum, Japanese food, and freshly baked pizza. My only complaint is that the restaurant revolves at such a breakneck speed—making a complete turn every 45 minutes—that it almost matches fast-paced Tokyo. If the thought makes you dizzy, there’s another buffet-style restaurant called **Top of the Tower** on the 40th floor of the New Otani’s tower, also with spectacular views of the city and offering Continental buffet lunches for ¥4,800 (\$40) and dinners for ¥7,500 (\$63).

Hotel New Otani, 4-1 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku. ☎ 03/3238-0028. Dinner buffet ¥6,300 (\$53); lunch buffet ¥3,500 (\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm. Station: Akasaka-mitsuke or Nagatacho (3 min.).

daidaiya ★ *Finds* VARIED JAPANESE/NOUVELLE JAPANESE Upon exiting the elevator, you’ll be forgiven for confusedly thinking you’ve somehow landed in a nightclub rather than a restaurant—the daidaiya’s dark, theatrical entrance is the first clue that this is not your ordinary Japanese restaurant. The dining room, a juxtaposition of modern and traditional with a slate floor, shoji screens, warm woods, and black furniture, is rather like the cuisine—a curious mix of traditional Japanese food and original nouvelle creations, all mouthwateringly good. Tatami seating is also available, with views over Akasaka. An English-language menu lists such entrees as oven-baked Spanish mackerel wrapped in rice paper and then grilled over charcoal with a soybean paste; and beef loin slices baked on hot pebbles with lettuce and sesame leaf and served with a soy sauce-flavored dip. Lunch sets, including obento, are equally satisfying. I love this place.

Bellevie Akasaka Building, 9th floor, 3-1-6 Akasaka. ☎ 03/3588-5087. Reservations recommended for dinner. Main dishes ¥1,200 – ¥2,500 (\$10–\$21); set dinner ¥6,000 – ¥8,000 (\$50–\$58); set lunch ¥780 – ¥3,500 (\$6.50–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm and 5pm–midnight (last order); Sat–Sun 11:30am–3pm and 5–11pm. Station: Akasaka-mitsuke (1 min.), underneath the Bellevie Akasaka Building.

Exploring Tokyo

Tokyo hasn't fared very well over the centuries. Fires and earthquakes have taken their toll, old buildings have been torn down in the zeal of modernization, and World War II left most of the city in ruins. The Tokyo of today has very little remaining of historical significance. Save your historical sightseeing for places like Kyoto, Nikko, and Kamakura, and consider Tokyo your introduction to the newest of the new in Japan, the showcase of the nation's accomplishments in the arts, technology, fashion, and design. It's also the best place in the world to take in Japan's performing arts, such as Kabuki, and such diverse activities as the tea ceremony, flower arranging, and sumo. Tokyo also has more museums than any other city in Japan, as well as a wide range of other attractions, including parks and temples. In Tokyo you can explore mammoth department stores, experiment with restaurants, walk around the various neighborhoods, revel in pop art and kitsch, and take advantage of glittering nightlife. There's so much to do in Tokyo that I can't imagine ever being bored there—even for a minute.

SEEING THE CITY BY GUIDED TOUR With the help of this book and a good map, you should be able to visit Tokyo's major attractions easily on your own. However, if you are pressed for time, consider taking one of several group tours of Tokyo and its environs offered by the **Japan Travel Bureau (JTB; ☎ 03/5796-5454; www.jtb.co.jp/sunrisetour)** and such tour companies as **Japan Gray Line**

(☎ **03/3433-5745; www.jgl.co.jp/inbound/index.htm**).

Day tours may include Tokyo Tower, the Imperial Palace district, Asakusa Sensoji Temple, Meiji Jingu Shrine, a harbor or river cruise, and the Ginza. There are also a number of organized evening tours that take in such activities as Kabuki or entertainment by geisha. Be warned, however, that tours are very tourist-oriented and are more expensive than touring Tokyo on your own. Prices range from about ¥4,000 (\$33) for a morning tour to about ¥9,800 (\$82) for a night tour with dinner and Kabuki. You can easily book tours through most tourist hotels and travel agencies.

For more personalized, one-on-one tours of Tokyo, contact **Jun's Tokyo Discovery Tours**, managed by Tokyoite Junko Matsuda, who offers tailored sightseeing trips to Tsukiji, Asakusa, Yanaka, Harajuku, Aoyama, Shibuya, and Shinjuku, as well as shopping trips and special-interest trips according to your interests. Tours are especially useful if you wish to communicate with shopkeepers and the locals, learn more about what you're seeing, or are timid about finding your way on public transportation (if you wish, you'll be met at your hotel). They cost ¥12,000 (\$100) for 1 day (8 hr.) and are available for up to four adults or a family. Reserve tours at least 3 days in advance (1 week preferred) by fax (03/3749-0445) or e-mail (me2@gb3.so-net.ne.jp), stating the desired tour date and what you'd like to see; messages can also be left at ☎ **03/3749-0445**.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES FOR SEEING THE CITY

There are two things to remember when planning your sightseeing itinerary: The city is huge, and it takes time to get from one end to the other. Plan your days so you cover Tokyo neighborhood by neighborhood, coordinating sightseeing with dinner and evening plans. The suggested itineraries below will guide you to the most important attractions, but note that some attractions are closed 1 day of the week.

If You Have 1 Day Start by getting up in the wee hours of the morning (if you've just flown in from North America, you'll be suffering from jet lag anyway and will find yourself wide awake by 5am) and head for the **Tsukiji Fish Market**, Japan's largest wholesale fish market (closed Sun, holidays, and some Wed). Be brave and try a breakfast of the freshest sushi you'll ever have. By 9am you should be on the Hibiya Line on your way to Ueno, where you should head to the **Tokyo National Museum**, the country's largest and most important museum of Japanese art (closed Mon). From there, you should head to Asakusa for lunch in one of the area's traditional Japanese restaurants, followed by a walk on Nakamise Dori (good for souvenirs) to **Sensoji Temple**. In the late afternoon, you might want to go to the Ginza for some shopping, followed by dinner in a restaurant of your choice. Drop by a yakitori-ya, a typical Japanese watering hole, for a beer and a snack. You might be exhausted by the end of the day, but you'll have seen some of the city's highlights.

If You Have 2 Days On the first day, get up early and go to **Tsukiji Fish Market**. Next, head for the nearby **Hama Rikyu Garden**, which opens at 9am. It's about a 20-minute walk from Tsukiji or a short taxi ride away. After touring the garden, one of the city's best, board the ferry that departs from inside the grounds for a trip up the Sumida River to Asakusa, where you can visit **Sensoji Temple** and shop along Nakamise Dori, then have lunch in a traditional Japanese restaurant. You

might even wish to follow "A Walking Tour of Asakusa," described later in this chapter. Next, take the bus to Ueno, where you should walk through Ueno Park to the **Tokyo National Museum**. Afterwards, head to the Ginza with its many department stores. If there's a performance, drop by the **Kabukiza theater** for part of a Kabuki play. Have dinner at a Ginza restaurant.

On your second day, go early in the morning to the **Edo-Tokyo Museum** (located next to the sumo stadium), a great museum that illuminates the city's tumultuous history. From there, head to colorful Harajuku, where you can visit **Meiji Jingu Shrine**, Tokyo's most famous Shinto shrine; the **Ota Memorial Museum of Art** with its collection of woodblock prints; and the **Oriental Bazaar**, a great place to shop for souvenirs. Spend the evening in one of Tokyo's famous nightlife districts such as Shinjuku or Roppongi.

If You Have 3 Days Spend the first 2 days as outlined above; on the third day head for **Kamakura**, one of Japan's most important historical sites. Located an hour south of Tokyo by train, Kamakura served as the capital back in the 1100s and is packed with temples and shrines, one of which features the outdoor Great Buddha bronze statue.

If You Have 4 or 5 Days Consider yourself lucky. Spend the first 3 days as outlined above; devote the fourth day to pursuing your own interests, such as taking a trip to one of Tokyo's numerous art or specialty museums, learning Japanese flower-arranging, shopping, soaking in a hot-spring bath, or following one of

the recommended walking tours in this chapter. This may be the evening to party wildly and stay out until the first subways start running at 5am.

If you have a fifth day, you might visit **Nikko**, approximately 2 hours north of Tokyo, to see the sumptuous mausoleum of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the shogun who succeeded in unifying Japan in the 1600s. Or you might

consider a 2-day trip to **Hakone**, famous for its fantastic open-air sculpture museum and home to some of the best old-fashioned Japanese inns near Tokyo. Hakone also offers unparalleled views of Mount Fuji if the weather is clear. See chapter 5 for more ideas on side trips from Tokyo.

1 The Top Attractions

Edo-Tokyo Museum (Edo-Tokyo Hakubutsukan) ★★ Kids The building housing this impressive museum is said to resemble a rice granary when viewed from afar, but to me it looks like a modern *torii*, the entrance gate to a shrine. This is the metropolitan government's ambitious attempt to present the history, art, disasters, science, culture, and architecture of Tokyo from its humble beginnings in 1590—when the first shogun, Tokugawa Ieyasu, made Edo (old Tokyo) the seat of his domain—to 1964, when Tokyo hosted the Olympics. All in all, the museum's great visual displays create a vivid portrayal of Tokyo through the centuries. I wouldn't miss it. Expect to spend at least 2 hours here.

After purchasing your tickets and taking the escalator to the sixth floor, you'll enter the museum by walking over a replica of Nihombashi Bridge, the starting point for all roads leading out of old Edo. Exhibits covering the Edo Period portray the lives of the shogun, merchants, craftspeople, and townspeople. Explanations are mostly in Japanese, but there's plenty to look at, including a replica Kabuki theater, a model of a daimyo's mansion, portable floats used during festivals, maps and photographs of old Edo, and—perhaps most interesting—a rowhouse tenement where Edo commoners lived in cramped quarters measuring only 10 sq. m (108 sq. ft.). Other displays cover the Meiji Restoration, the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923, and the bombing raids of World War II (Japan's own role as aggressor is disappointingly glossed over).

If you have time, consider taking advantage of a **free guided tour** service, offered by volunteers daily 10am to 3pm (last tour). Most tours last 1 to 2 hours, depending on the level of visitor interest, and are insightful for their explanations of the Japanese-only displays. My guide, for example, picked out fascinating scenes depicted on a screen of 1630s Edo, from a bathhouse to military training grounds. Tours are not comprehensive; you may wish to explore the museum afterwards on your own. Kids can find much to interest them here.

1-4-1 Yokoami, Sumida-ku. ☎ 03/3626-9974. www.edo-tokyo-museum.or.jp/museum-e/guide.htm. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥480 (\$4) students, ¥300 (\$2.50) junior-high and high-school students, free for children. Tues–Wed and Sat–Sun 9:30am–5:30pm; Thurs–Fri 9:30am–8pm. Station: Ryogoku on the JR Sobu and Oedo lines (2 min.).

The Imperial Palace (Kyokyo) ★ The Imperial Palace, home of the imperial family, is the heart and soul of Tokyo; all Japanese tourists make brief stops here to pay their respects. Built on the very spot where Edo Castle used to stand during the days of the Tokugawa shogunate, it became the imperial home upon its completion in 1888 and is now the residence of Emperor Akihito, 125th emperor of Japan. Destroyed during air raids in 1945, the palace was rebuilt in 1968 using the principles of traditional Japanese architecture. But don't expect to get a good look at it; most of the palace ground's 114 hectares (284 acres)

are off-limits to the public, except 2 days a year when the royal family makes an appearance before the throngs: New Year's Day and the emperor's birthday (Dec 23). It is also open for free **guided tours** Monday through Friday at 10am and 1:30pm, but you must register at least 1 day in advance (reservations are accepted up to 1 month in advance) by calling ☎ **03/3213-111**, ext. 485 or 486, and then stopping by the Imperial Household (located at the Sakashitamon Gate, on the east side of palace grounds) to provide your passport number, nationality, name, age, occupation, and address in Tokyo. Tours, conducted only in Japanese, last about 75 minutes and lead you past official buildings, the inner moat and historic fortifications, and Nijubashi Bridge. I recommend this tour only if you have time to spare and have already seen Tokyo's other top attractions.

Otherwise, you'll have to console yourself with a camera shot of the palace from the southeast side of **Nijubashi Bridge**, with the moat and the palace turrets showing above the trees. The wide moat, lined with cherry trees, is especially beautiful in the spring. You might even want to spend an hour strolling the 4.8km (3 miles) around the palace and moat. But the most important thing to do in the vicinity of the palace is to visit its **Higashi Gyoen (East Garden)**, where you'll find what's left of the central keep of old Edo Castle, the stone foundation; see the garden's review on p. 183.

Hibiya Dori Ave. Station: Nijubashi-mae (1 min.) or Hibiya (5 min.).

Meiji Jingu Shrine ★★ This is Tokyo's most venerable Shinto shrine, opened in 1920 in honor of then-Emperor and Empress Meiji, who were instrumental in opening Japan to the outside world more than 120 years ago. Japan's two largest *torii* (the traditional entry gate of a shrine), built of cypress more than 1,700 years old, give dramatic entrance to the grounds, once the estate of a *daimyo* (feudal lord). The shaded pathway is lined with trees, shrubs, and dense woods. In late May and throughout June, the **Iris Garden** is in spectacular bloom (separate admission fee charged). The shrine itself, about a 10-minute walk from the first torii, is a fine example of dignified and refined Shinto architecture. It's made of plain Japanese cypress and topped with green-copper roofs. Meiji Jingu Shrine is the place to be on New Year's Eve, when more than two million people crowd onto the grounds to usher in the New Year.

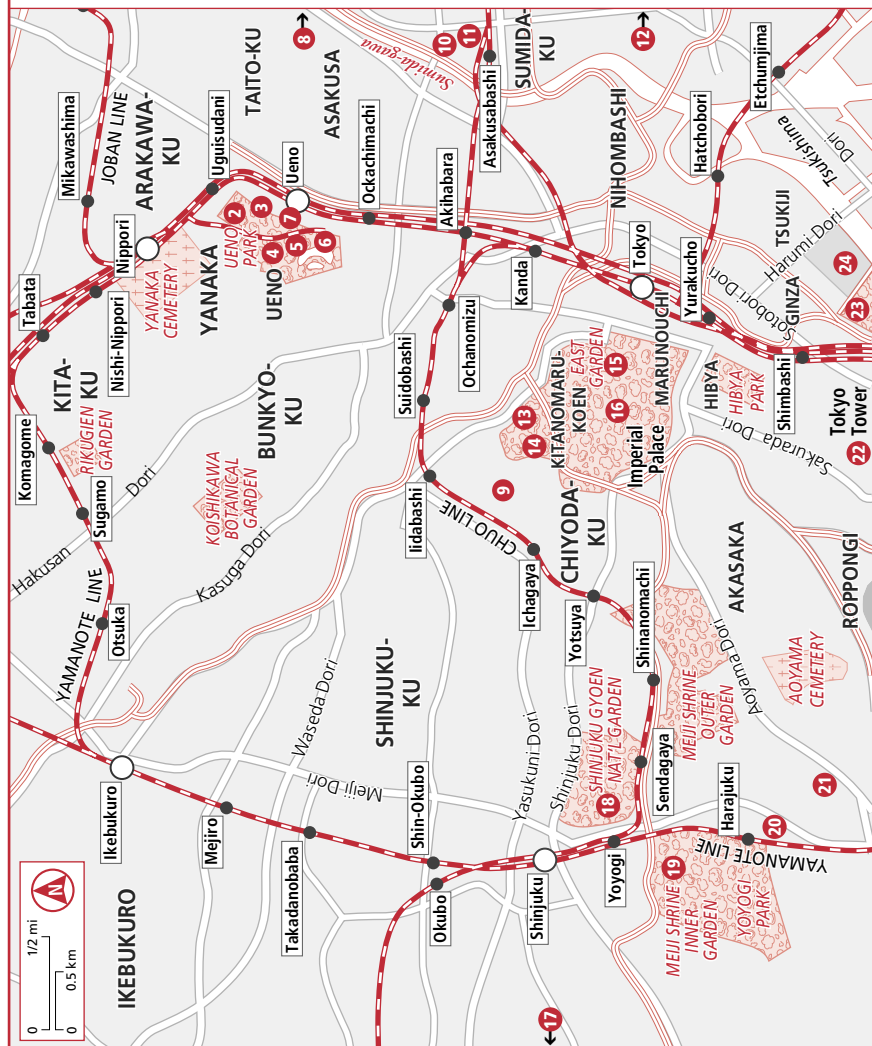
Meiji Shrine Inner Garden, 1-1 Kamazono-cho, Yoyogi, Shibuya-ku. ☎ **03/3379-5511**. Free admission. Daily sunrise-sunset (until 4:30pm in winter). Station: Harajuku (2 min.).

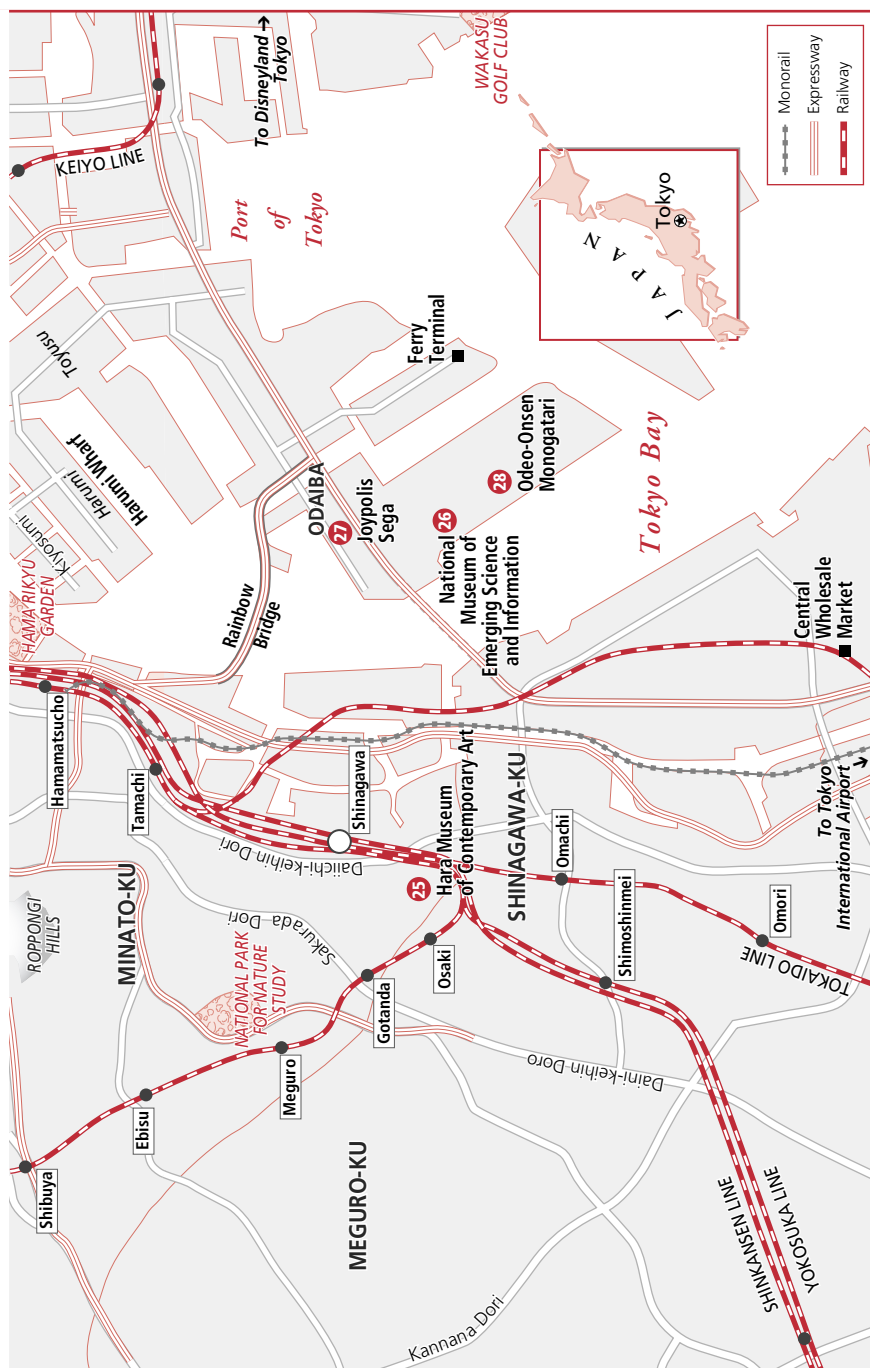
Sensoji Temple ★★ This is Tokyo's oldest and most popular temple, with a history dating back to 628. That was when, according to popular lore, two brothers fishing in the nearby Sumida River netted the catch of their lives—a tiny golden statue of Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy and happiness who is empowered with the ability to release humans from all suffering. Sensoji Temple (also popularly known as Asakusa Kannon) was erected in her honor, and although the statue is housed here, it's never shown to the public. Still, through the centuries, worshippers have flocked here, seeking favors of Kannon; and when Sensoji Temple burned down during a 1945 bombing raid, the present structure was rebuilt with donations by the Japanese people.

Colorful **Nakamise Dori**, a pedestrian lane leading to the shrine, is lined with traditional shops and souvenir stands, while nearby **Demboin Garden** remains an insider's favorite as a peaceful oasis away from the bustling crowds. Asakusa is one of my favorite neighborhoods, and you can easily spend half a day here; see the walking tour on p. 189 for more on this fascinating part of old Tokyo.

2-3-1 Asakusa, Taito-ku. ☎ **03/3842-0181**. Free admission. Daily 6am-5pm. Station: Asakusa (2 min.).

Tokyo Attractions





Frommer's Favorite Tokyo Experiences

Strolling Through Asakusa Asakusa conveys the atmosphere of old Tokyo better than any other place in the city. Sensoji Temple is the city's oldest and most popular temple, and Nakamise Dori, the pedestrian lane leading to the temple, is lined with open-fronted stalls selling souvenirs and traditional Japanese goods.

Taking in the Early-Morning Action at Tsukiji Fish Market Get up early your first morning in Japan (you'll probably be wide awake with jet lag anyway) and head straight for the country's largest fish market, where you can watch the tuna auctions, browse through stalls of seafood, and sample the freshest sushi you'll ever have.

Spending an Evening in a Yakitori-ya There's no better place to observe Tokyo's army of office workers at play than at a yakitori-ya, a drinking place that serves skewered foods and bar snacks. They're fun, noisy, and boisterous.

Watching a Kabuki Play at the Kabukiza Theater Kabuki has served as the most popular form of entertainment for the masses since the Edo Period. Watch the audience members as they yell their approval; watch the stage for gorgeous costumes, stunning stage settings, and easy-to-understand dramas of love, duty, and revenge.

Viewing the Treasures at the Tokyo National Museum There's a feast for the eyes at the world's largest museum of Japanese art, packed with everything from samurai armor and lacquerware to kimono and woodblock prints. If you visit only one museum in Tokyo, this should be it.

Hanging Out in Harajuku on Sunday Start with brunch and then stroll Omotesando Dori for people-watching. Shop the area's boutiques, visit a couple of museums and the Meiji Shrine, or just sit back and take in all the action from a sidewalk cafe.

Tokyo National Museum (Tokyo Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan) ★★★ The National Museum not only is the largest and oldest museum in Japan, it also boasts the largest collection of Japanese art in the world. This is where you go to see antiques from Japan's past—gorgeous kimono, samurai armor, priceless swords, lacquerware, metalwork, pottery, scrolls, screens, Ukiyo-e (woodblock prints), calligraphy, ceramics, archaeological finds, and more. Items are shown on a rotating basis, with about 2,500 on display at any one time—so no matter how many times you visit the museum, you'll always see something new. You'll need 2 hours to do it justice.

The museum comprises five buildings. The **Main Gallery (Honkan)**, straight ahead as you enter the main gate, is the most important one, devoted to Japanese art. Here you'll view Japanese ceramics; Buddhist sculptures dating from about A.D. 538 to 1192; samurai armor, helmets, and decorative sword mountings; swords, which throughout Japanese history were considered to embody spirits all their own; textiles and kimono; lacquerware; and paintings, calligraphy, Ukiyo-e, and scrolls. Be sure to check out the museum shop in the basement; it sells reproductions from the museum's collections as well as traditional crafts by contemporary artists.

Seeing Sumo Nothing beats watching huge sumo wrestlers (most weigh well over 135kg/300 lb.) throw each other around. Matches are held in Tokyo in January, May, and September; catch one on TV if you can't make it in person.

Shopping the Department Stores Tokyo's department stores are huge, spotless, and filled with merchandise, some of which you never knew existed; many also have first-rate art galleries. Shibuya and Ginza boast the greatest concentration of department stores. Tobu, in Ikebukuro, is the city's largest—a virtual city in itself. Be there when the doors open in the morning and you can witness a sight you'll never see back home: employees lined up in a row, bowing to incoming customers.

Soaking in Hot-Spring Baths at Oedo-Onsen Monogatari This Edo-themed public bath features hot-spring waters pumped up from the deep outdoor tubs, massage, souvenirs, and restaurants, making this a standout for soaking away urban stress.

Feasting on a Kaiseki Meal A kaiseki meal, consisting of dish after dish of artfully displayed delectables, goes for big bucks—but it may well be the most beautiful and memorable meal you'll ever have. Splurge at least once on the most expensive kaiseki meal you can afford, and you'll feel like royalty.

Taking a Spin Through Kabuki-cho Shinjuku's Kabuki-cho has the craziest nightlife in all of Tokyo, with countless strip joints, porn shops, restaurants, bars, and the greatest concentration of neon you're likely to see anywhere. It's a fascinating place for an evening stroll.

Clubbing in Roppongi You can dance and party the night away in the madness that's Roppongi; most revelers party 'til dawn.

The **Gallery of Asian Art Antiquities (Toyokan)** houses art and archaeological artifacts from everywhere in Asia outside Japan. There are Buddhas from China and Gandhara, stone reliefs from Cambodia, embroidered wall hangings and cloth from India, Iranian and Turkish carpets, Thai and Vietnamese ceramics, and more. Chinese art—including jade, paintings, calligraphy, and ceramics—makes up the largest part of the collection, illustrating China's tremendous influence on Japanese art, architecture, and religion. You'll also find Egyptian relics, including a mummy dating from around 751 to 656 B.C. and wooden objects from the 20th century B.C.

The **Heiseikan Gallery**, opened in 1999, is where you'll find archaeological relics of ancient Japan, including pottery and Haniwa clay burial figurines of the Jomon Period (10,000 B.C.–1,000 B.C.) and ornamental, keyhole-shaped tombs from the Yayoi Period (400 B.C.–A.D. 200). The **Gallery of Horyuji Treasures (Horyuji Homotsukan)** displays priceless Buddhist treasures from the Horyuji Temple in Nara, founded by Prince Shotoku in 607. Although the building's stark modernity (designed by Taniguchi Yoshio, who also designed the expansion of the New York Museum of Modern Art) seems odd for an exhibition of antiquities, the gallery's low lighting and simple architecture lend dramatic

effect to the museum's priceless collection of bronze Buddhist statues, ceremonial Gigaku masks used in ritual dances, lacquerware, and paintings. The **Hyokeikan**, built in 1909 to commemorate the marriage of Emperor Taisho, holds special exhibitions.

Ueno Park, Taito-ku. ㊦ 03/3822-1111. www.tnm.jp. Admission ¥420 (\$3.50) adults, ¥130 (\$1.10) students, ¥70 (60¢) children, free for seniors (except during special exhibitions). Oct–Mar Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (enter by 4:30pm); Apr–Sept Tues–Thurs and Sat–Sun 9:30am–5pm, Fri 9:30am–8pm. Closed Dec 29–Jan 1. Station: Ueno (10 min.).

Tsukiji Fish Market ★★☆☆ This huge wholesale fish market—the largest in Japan and one of the largest in the world—is a must for anyone who has never seen such a market in action. And the action here starts early: At about 3am, boats begin arriving from the seas around Japan, from Africa, and even from America, with enough fish to satisfy the demands of a nation where seafood reigns supreme. To give you some idea of its enormity, this market handles almost all the seafood consumed in Tokyo. The king is tuna, huge and frozen, unloaded from the docks, laid out on the ground, and numbered. Wholesalers then walk up and down the rows, jotting down the numbers of the best-looking tuna, and by 5:30am, the tuna auctions are well under way (the entire auction of sea products takes place about 5–7am). The wholesalers then transfer what they've bought to their own stalls in the market, subsequently selling the fish to their regular customers, usually retail stores and restaurants.

The market is held in a cavernous, hangarlike building, which means you can visit it even on a dismal rainy morning. There's a lot going on—men in black rubber boots rushing wheelbarrows and carts through the aisles, hawkers shouting, knives chopping and slicing. Wander the aisles and you'll see things you never dreamed were edible. This is a good place to bring your camera if you have a flash: The people working here burst with pride if you single them out for a photograph. The floors are wet, so leave your fancy shoes at the hotel.

Tsukiji is also a good place to come if you want sushi for breakfast. Beside the covered market are rows of barracklike buildings divided into **sushi restaurants and shops** related to the fish trade. In addition, as you walk the distance between Tsukiji Station and the fish market, you'll find yourself in a delightful district of tiny retail shops and stalls where you can buy the freshest seafood in town, plus dried fish and fish products, seaweed, vegetables, knives, cooking utensils, pottery, and more. **Warning:** While walking through the retail district on our way from Tsukiji Market, my Japanese friend and I were warned several times by local shopkeepers to keep watch over our purses, advice we didn't take lightly. Apparently, pickpockets have been at work here on unsuspecting tourists.

5–2–1 Tsukiji, Chuo-ku. ㊦ 03/3542-1111. Free admission. Mon–Sat 5–11am (best time 5:30–9am). Closed some Wed, holidays, New Year's, and Aug 15–16. Station: Tsukijishijo (exit A2, 2 min), Tsukiji (Honganji Temple exit, 10 min.).

2 Five Unforgettable Ways to Immerse Yourself in Japanese Culture

Just walking down the street could be considered a cultural experience in Japan, but there are more concrete ways to learn more about this country's cultural life: The best is by participating in some of its time-honored rituals and traditions. For some background information on Japanese flower arranging, the tea ceremony, and other activities recommended below, see “Cultural Snapshots: Japanese Arts in a Nutshell,” in appendix A.

IKEBANA Instruction in ikebana, or Japanese flower arranging, is available at several schools in Tokyo, a few of which offer classes in English on a regular basis. (**Note:** You should call beforehand to enroll.) **Sogetsu Ikebana School**, 7-2-21 Akasaka (☎ 03/3408-1151; station: Aoyama-Itchome, a 5-min. walk from exit 4), offers instruction in English on Monday from 10am to noon (closed in Aug). One lesson for first-time participants is ¥4,850 (\$41), including the cost of the flowers and materials. The **Ohara Ikebana School**, 5-7-17 Minami Aoyama (☎ 03/5774-5097; www.ohararyu.or.jp; station: Omotesando, 3-min. walk from exit B1), offers 2-hour instruction in English at 10am on Wednesday and 10am and 1:30pm on Thursday, charging ¥4,000 (\$33) for instruction and materials.

If you wish to see ikebana, ask at the **Tourist Information Office** whether there are any special exhibitions. Department stores sometimes have special ikebana exhibitions in their galleries. Another place to look is **Yasukuni Shrine**, located on Yasukuni Dori northwest of the Imperial Palace (closest station: Ichigaya or Kudanshita). Dedicated to Japanese war dead, the shrine is also famous for ongoing ikebana exhibitions on its grounds.

TEA CEREMONY Several first-class hotels hold tea-ceremony demonstrations in special tea-ceremony rooms. Reservations are usually required, and since they're often booked by groups, you'll want to call in advance to see whether you can participate. **Seisei-an**, on the seventh floor of the Hotel New Otani, 4-1 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku (☎ 03/3265-1111, ext. 2443; station: Nagatacho or Akasaka-mitsuke, a 3-min. walk from both), holds 20-minute demonstrations Thursday through Saturday from 11am to 4pm. The cost is ¥1,050 (\$8.75), including tea and sweets. **Chosho-an**, on the seventh floor of the Hotel Okura, 2-10-4 Toranomon, Minato-ku (☎ 03/3582-0111; station: Toranomon or Kamiyacho, a 10-min. walk from both), gives 30-minute demonstrations anytime between 11am and noon and between 1 and 4pm Monday through Saturday except holidays. Appointments are required; the cost is ¥1,050 (\$8.75) for tea and sweets. At **Toko-an**, on the fourth floor of the Imperial Hotel, 1-1-1 Uchisaiwaicho, Chiyoda-ku (☎ 03/3504-1111; station: Hibiya, 1 min.), demonstrations are given from 10am to noon and 1 to 4pm Monday through Saturday except holidays. Reservations are required. The fee is ¥1,500 (\$13) for tea and sweets.

Lessons in the tea ceremony conducted in English are held several times weekly at the **Waraku-an**, located just behind the Canadian Embassy in Minato Ward. A one-time membership fee is ¥5,000 (\$42), while monthly fees are ¥5,000 (\$42) for two lessons and ¥8,000 (\$67) for three lessons. For more information, contact the **International Chado Culture Foundation** at ☎ 03/3512-2566.

ACUPUNCTURE & SHIATSU Although most Westerners have heard of acupuncture, they may not be familiar with *shiatsu* (Japanese pressure-point massage). Most first-class hotels in Japan offer shiatsu in the privacy of your room. There are acupuncture clinics everywhere in Tokyo, and the staff of your hotel may be able to tell you of one nearby. As it's not likely the clinic's staff will speak English, it might be a good idea to have the guest relations officer at your hotel not only make the reservation but specify the treatment you want. Otherwise, English is spoken at these two clinics: **Yamate Acupuncture Clinic**, second floor of the ULS Nakameguro Building, 1-3-3 Higashiyama, Meguro-ku (☎ 03-3792-8989; station: Nakameguro, 6 min.), open Monday to Friday

9am to 8pm and Saturday 9am to 2pm and charging ¥3,000 (\$25) for a specific treatment or ¥5,000 (\$42) for the whole body, plus a ¥1,000 (\$8.35) initial fee; and **Tani Clinic**, third floor of the Taishoseimei Hibiya Building, 1-9-1 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku (☎ 03/3201-5675; station: Hibiya, 1 min.), open Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday 9am to noon and 2 to 5pm and charging ¥10,500 (\$88) for the first visit and ¥6,300 (\$53) for each subsequent visit.

PUBLIC BATHS Tokyo has an estimated 1,145 *sento* (public baths)—which may sound like a lot but is nothing compared to the 2,687 the city used to have just 30-some years ago. Easily recognizable by a tall chimney and shoe lockers just inside the door, a *sento* sells just about anything you might need at the bathhouse—soap, shampoo, towels, even underwear.

For a real bathing experience, however, nothing beats a 3- or 4-hour respite at the **Oedo-Onsen Monogatari**, 2-57 Aomi at Odaiba (☎ 03/5500-1126; station: Telecom Center, 2 min.), which tapped mineral-rich hot-spring waters 1,380m (4,600 ft.) below ground to supply this re-created Edo-Era bathhouse village. After changing into *yukata* (cotton kimono) and depositing your belongings in a locker (your key is bar-coded so no need to carry any money), you'll stroll past souvenir shops and restaurants on your way to massage rooms and sand baths (extra fee charged) and the *onsen* (hot-spring baths) complete with outdoor baths, Jacuzzi, steam baths, and saunas. Since as many as 6,500 bathers pour into this facility on weekends, come on a weekday, and since signs in English are virtually nonexistent, observe gender before entering bathing areas (a hint: women's baths usually have pink or red curtains, men's blue). Open daily 11am to 9am the next day. Admission is ¥2,700 (\$23).

ZAZEN A few temples in the Tokyo vicinity occasionally offer sitting meditation with instruction in English. Approximately 30 minutes east of Akihabara on the Sobu Line is **Ida Ryogoku-do zazen Dojo** of the Sotoshu Sect, 5-11-20 Minami Yawata, Ichikawa City (☎ 0473/79-1596; station: Moto-Yawata, 5 min.). Zazen is held daily at 5:30 and 10am and 3 and 8:30pm, generally for 45 minutes (call to confirm times). A Dogen-Sangha meeting is held the fourth Saturday of the month from 1 to 2:30pm, consisting of 30 minutes for zazen followed by a 1-hour lecture. Participation is free, and if you call from Moto-Yawata Station, someone will come for you. You can also stay here longer to practice Zen; call Mr. Nishijima at ☎ 03/3435-0701 for more information.

In addition, the **Young Men's Buddhist Association of Tokyo University**, of the Sotoshu Sect, second floor of the Nippon Shimpan Building, 3-33-5 Hongo (☎ 03/3235-0701; station: Hongo-Sanchome, 3 min.), holds a Dogen-Sangha meeting the first, third, and fifth Saturdays of each month from 1 to 2:30pm, which includes 30 minutes of zazen and a 1-hour lecture in English. There's a ¥400 (\$2.50) fee. This one, too, allows long-term stays.

3 Parks & Gardens

Although Japan's most famous gardens are not in Tokyo, the first three places listed below use traditional principles of landscaping and give visitors an idea of the scope and style of Japanese gardens. (Nearby skyscrapers, however, detract from their charm; there ought to be a law.) The fourth listing, Ueno Park, is Tokyo's largest city park and contains a number of museums and attractions, making it one of the city's most visited places.

Hama Rikyu Garden ㊦ Considered by some to be the best garden in Tokyo (but marred, in my opinion, by nearby buildings that detract from its charm), this peaceful oasis has origins stretching back 300 years, when it served as a retreat for a former feudal lord and as duck-hunting grounds for the Tokugawa shogun. In 1871, possession of the garden passed to the imperial family, who used it to entertain such visiting dignitaries as U.S. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant. Come here to see how the upper classes enjoyed themselves during the Edo Period. Located on Tokyo Bay and surrounded by water on three sides, the garden contains an inner tidal pool, spanned by three bridges draped with wisteria. There are also other ponds; a refuge for ducks, herons, and migratory birds; a promenade along the bay lined with pine trees and offering views of Rainbow Bridge; a 300-year-old pine; moon-viewing pavilions; and teahouses. Plan on at least an hour's stroll to see everything. From a boarding pier inside the garden's grounds, ferries depart for the Asakusa neighborhood every hour (or more often) between 10:20am and 3:40pm; the fare is ¥620 (\$5.15) one-way.

1-1 Hamarikyuteien, Chuo-ku. ☎ 03/3541-0200. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50). Daily 9am-5pm. Station: Shiodome (exit 5, 5 min.) or Shimbashi (12 min.).

East Garden (Higashi Gyoen) ㊦ The 21 hectares (53 acres) of the formal Higashi Gyoen—once the main grounds of Edo Castle and located next to the Imperial Palace—are a wonderful respite in the middle of the city. Yet surprisingly, this garden is hardly ever crowded. **Ninomaru**, my favorite part, is laid out in Japanese style with a pond, stepping stones, and winding paths; it's particularly beautiful when the wisteria, azaleas, irises, and other flowers are in bloom. Near Ninomaru is the **Sannomaru Shozokan**, which displays changing exhibitions of art treasures belonging to the imperial family free of charge.

On the highest spot of Higashi Gyoen is the **Honmaru** (inner citadel), where Tokugawa's main castle once stood. Built in the first half of the 1600s, the castle was massive, surrounded by a series of moats and guarded by 23 watchtowers and 99 gates around its 16km (10-mile) perimeter. At its center was Japan's tallest building at the time, the five-story castle keep, soaring 50m (168 ft.) above its foundations and offering an expansive view over Edo. Today all that remains of Tokugawa's castle are a few towers, gates, stone walls, moats, and the stone foundations of the keep.

1-1 Chiyoda, Chiyoda-ku. ☎ 03/3213-2050. Free admission. Mar-Oct Tues-Thurs and Sat-Sun 9am-4:30pm (enter by 4pm); Nov-Feb Tues-Thurs and Sat-Sun 9am-4pm (enter by 3:30pm). Closed Dec 23 and Dec 28-Jan 3; open other national holidays. Station: Otemachi, Takebashi, or Nijubashi-mae.

Shinjuku Gyoen ★ Formerly the private estate of a feudal lord and then the imperial family, this is considered one of the most important parks of the Meiji Era. It's wonderful for strolling because of the variety of its planted gardens; styles range from French and English to Japanese traditional. This place amazes me every time I come here. The park's 58 hectares (144 acres) make it one of the city's largest, and each bend in the pathway brings something completely different: Ponds and sculpted bushes give way to a promenade lined with sycamores that opens up into a rose garden. Cherry blossoms, azaleas, chrysanthemums, and other flowers provide splashes of color from spring through autumn. There are also wide grassy expanses, popular for picnics and playing, and a greenhouse filled with tropical plants.

11 Naitocho, Shinjuku-ku. ☎ 03/3350-0151. Admission ¥200 (\$1.65). Tues-Sun 9am-4:30pm (enter by 4pm). Station: Shinjuku Gyoen-mae (2 min.).

Ueno Park Ueno Park—on the northeast edge of the Yamanote Line—is one of the largest parks in Tokyo and one of the most popular places in the city for Japanese families on a day's outing. It's a cultural mecca with a number of attractions, including the prestigious Tokyo National Museum; the National Museum of Western Art; the delightful Shitamachi Museum with its displays of old Tokyo; Ueno Zoo; and Shinobazu Pond, a bird sanctuary. For a map of the Ueno area, see p. 127.

A landmark in the park is the small **Toshogu Shrine**. Erected in 1651, it's dedicated to Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa shogunate. Stop here to pay respects to the man who made Edo (present-day Tokyo) the seat of his government and thus elevated the small village to the most important city in the country. The pathway to the shrine is lined with massive stone lanterns, as well as 50 copper lanterns donated by *daimyo* (feudal lords) from all over Japan. Entrance to the shrine itself is to the left of the main building, where you can see examples of exquisite art, including murals by a famous Edo artist, Kano Tan-yu, and samurai armor worn by Ieyasu. The shrine is open daily from 9am to 6pm (to 4:30pm in winter); admission is ¥200 (\$1.65). On a more somber note, there's also a display on the shrine grounds appealing for world peace, with photographs of Hiroshima following its destruction by the atom bomb and of victims dead and alive.

Also in the park is **Kiyomizu Kannon-do Temple**, completed in 1631 as a copy of the famous Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto (but on a much less grand scale). It enshrines Kosodate Kannon, protectress of childbearing and child-raising. Women hoping to become pregnant come here to ask for the goddess's blessing; those whose wishes have been fulfilled return to pray for their children's good health and protection. Many leave behind dolls as symbols of their children—if you take your shoes off and walk to the door to the right of the inner shrine, you'll see some of those dolls. Once a year, a requiem service is held for all the dolls at the temple, after which they are cremated.

The busiest time of the year at Ueno Park is April, during the **cherry-blossom season**, when people come en masse to celebrate the birth of the new season. It's not the spiritual communion with nature that you might think, however. On weekends and in the evenings during cherry-blossom time (which only lasts for a few days), havoc prevails as office workers break out of their winter shells. Whole companies converge on the park to sit under the cherry trees on plastic or cardboard, and everyone drinks sake and beer and gets drunk and rowdy and—worst of all—sings karaoke. At any rate, visiting Ueno Park during cherry-blossom season is an experience no one should miss. More than likely, you'll be invited to join one of the large groups—and by all means, do so.

Taito-ku. Free admission to the park; separate admissions to each of its attractions. Open daily 24 hr. Station: Ueno (1 min.).

4 More Museums

In addition to the museums listed below, Tokyo has a wealth of small museums specializing in everything from woodblock prints to architecture; for a more complete list of Tokyo museums, see *Frommer's Tokyo*. For details on the **Tokyo National Museum** and the **Edo-Tokyo Museum**, see “The Top Attractions,” earlier in this chapter.

Fukagawa Edo Museum (Fukagawa Edo Shiryokan) ★★ *Kids* This is the Tokyo of your dreams, the way it appears in all those samurai flicks on Japanese TV: A reproduction of a 19th-century neighborhood in Fukagawa, a prosperous community on the east bank of the Sumida River during the Edo Period. This delightful museum is located off Kiyosumi Dori on a pleasant tree-lined, shop-filled street called Fukagawa Shiryokan Dori. The museum's hangarlike interior contains 11 full-scale replicas of traditional houses, vegetable and rice shops, a fish store, two inns, a fire watchtower, and tenement homes, all arranged to resemble an actual neighborhood. There are lots of small touches and flourishes to make the community seem real and believable—a cat sleeping on a roof, a snail crawling up a fence, a dog relieving itself on a pole, sounds of birds, and a vendor shouting his wares. The village even changes with the seasons (with trees sprouting cherry blossoms in the spring and threatened with thunderstorms in summer) and, every 45 minutes or so, undergoes a day's cycle from morning (roosters crow, lights brighten) to night (the sun sets, the retractable roof closes to make everything dark). Of Tokyo's museums, this one is probably the best for children; plan on spending about 45 minutes here. Don't confuse this museum with the much larger Edo-Tokyo Museum, which traces the history of Tokyo.

1–3–28 Shirakawa, Koto-ku. ☎ 03/3630-8625. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥50 (40¢) children 6–14. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed 2nd and 4th Mon of each month. Station: Kiyosumi-Shirakawa (3 min.).

Hara Museum of Contemporary Art (Hara Bijutsukan) ★★ Japan's oldest museum devoted to contemporary international and Japanese art is housed in a 1930s tiled, Bauhaus-style Art Deco home that once belonged to the current director's grandfather; the building alone is worth the trip. The museum stages three or four exhibitions annually; some are on the cutting edge of international art, but at least one features works from its own collection, which focuses on paintings and sculptures mainly from the 1950s and 1960s by Japanese and foreign artists and includes works by Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Jackson Pollock, Karel Appel, Robert Rauschenberg, and Frank Stella. Be sure to check out the downstairs toilet by Morimura Yasumasu. Afterward, relax at the lovely greenhouse-like cafe with outdoor seating. You'll spend at least an hour at this great museum.

4–7–25 Kita-Shinagawa, Shinagawa-ku. ☎ 03/3445-0651. www.haramuseum.or.jp. Admission ¥1,000 (\$8.35) adults, ¥700 (\$5.85) students 16 and older, ¥500 (\$4.15) children, free for seniors. Tues, Thurs–Sun, and holidays 11am–5pm; Wed 11am–8pm. Closed during exhibition changes. Station: Shinagawa (Takanawa exit, 15 min.).

Tips Museum Tips

Note: Most museums in Tokyo are closed on Mondays and for New Year's, generally the last few days in December and the first 3 days of January. If Monday happens to be a national holiday, most museums will remain open but will close Tuesday instead. Some of the privately owned museums, however, may also be closed on national holidays, as well as for exhibition changes. Call beforehand to avoid disappointment. Remember, too, that you must enter museums at least 30 minutes before closing time. For a listing of current special exhibitions, including those being held at major department stores, consult *Metropolis*, published weekly.

Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (MOT; Tokyo-to Gendai Bijutsukan) ★ The MOT is inconveniently located but is well worth the trek if you're a fan of the avant-garde (you'll pass the Fukagawa Edo Museum, described above, on the way, so you may wish to visit both). This modern structure of glass and steel, with a long corridor entrance that reminds me of railroad trestles, houses both permanent and temporary exhibits of Japanese and international postwar art in large rooms that lend themselves to large installations. Although temporary exhibits, which occupy most of the museum space, have ranged from Southeast Asian art to a retrospective of Jasper Johns, the smaller permanent collection presents a chronological study of 50 years of contemporary art, beginning with Japanese postwar avant-garde and continuing with anti-artistic trends and pop art in the 1960s, Minimalism, and art after the 1980s, with about 100 works displayed on a rotating basis. Included may be works by Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter, Roy Lichtenstein, David Hockney, Frank Stella, Sandro Chia, and Julian Schnabel. Depending on the number of exhibits you visit, you'll spend anywhere from 1 to 2 hours here. Bonus: A computer room lets you surf the Internet for free.

4-1-1 Miyoshi, Koto-ku. ☎ 03/5245-4111. Admission to permanent collection ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) students, ¥250 (\$2.10) children; special exhibits ¥1,000 (\$8.35) or more. Tues-Sun 10am-6pm. Station: Kiyosumi-Shirakawa (exit A3, 13 min.). On Fukagawa Shiroyokan-dori St., just off Mitsume Dori.

National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation (Nippon Kagaku Miraikan) (Kids) Opened in 2001 on Odaiba, this fascinating, educational museum provides hands-on exploration of the latest developments in cutting-edge science and technology, including interactions with robots, virtual-reality rides, and displays that suggest future applications such as non-invasive medical procedures and an environmentally friendly home. Everything from nanotechnology to genomes are explained in detail; touch-screens in English and a volunteer staff eager to assist in demonstrations and answer questions catapult this to one of the most user-friendly technology museums I've ever seen. A great place to get your brain cells up and running whether you're 4 years old or 80, this museum deserves at least 3 or 4 hours.

2-41 Aomi, Koto-ku. ☎ 03/3570-9151. www.miraikan.jst.go.jp. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Wed-Mon 10am-5pm. Station: Telecom Center or Fune-no-Kagakukan (5 min.).

National Museum of Modern Art (Tokyo Kokuritsu Kindai Bijutsukan) This newly renovated museum houses the largest collection of modern Japanese art under one roof, including both Japanese- and Western-style paintings, prints, watercolors, drawings, and sculpture, all dating from the Meiji Period to the 1960s. Names to look for include Munahata Shiko, Kuroda Seiki, and Yokoyama Taikan. To provide a wider context, a few Western artists are also represented, among them Klee and Kandinsky. Expect to spend about 90 minutes here. Nearby, in Kitanomaru Koen Park, is a branch of the museum, the **Crafts Gallery (Bijutsukan Kogeikan; ☎ 03/3211-7781; open Tues-Sun 10am-5pm)**, housed in a handsome Gothic-style brick building constructed in 1910 as headquarters of the Imperial Guard and now exhibiting contemporary crafts such as pottery, lacquerware, bamboo works, and more, in changing exhibitions.

3 Kitanomaru Koen Park, Chiyoda-ku. ☎ 03/3214-2561. www.momat.go.jp. Admission ¥420 (\$3.50) adults, ¥130 (\$1.10) students, free for children; special exhibits cost more. Tues-Thurs and Sat-Sun 10am-5pm; Fri 10am-8pm. Station: Takebashi (5 min.).

National Museum of Western Art (Kokuritsu Seiyō Bijutsukan) Japan's only national museum dedicated to Western art is housed in a main building designed by Le Corbusier and two more recent additions. It presents a chronological study of sculpture and art from the end of the Middle Ages through the 20th century, beginning with works by Old Masters, including Lucas Cranach the Elder, Rubens, El Greco, Murillo, and Tiepolo. French painters and Impressionists of the 19th and 20th centuries are well represented, including Delacroix, Monet (with a whole room devoted to his work), Manet, Renoir, Pissarro, Sisley, Courbet, Cézanne, and Gauguin. The museum's 20th-century collection includes works by Picasso, Max Ernst, Miro, Dubuffet, and Pollock. The museum is also famous for its 50-odd sculptures by Rodin, one of the largest collections in the world, encompassing most of his major works including *The Kiss*, *The Thinker*, *Balzac*, and *The Gates of Hell*. Plan on an hour here.

Ueno Park, Taitō-ku. ☎ 03/3828-5131. www.nmwa.go.jp. Admission ¥420 (\$3.50) adults, ¥130 (\$1.10) students, ¥70 (60¢) high-school students, free for children and seniors; special exhibits require separate admission fee. Free admission to permanent collection 2nd and 4th Sat of the month. Tues–Thurs and Sat–Sun 9:30am–5pm; Fri 9:30am–8pm. Station: Ueno (4 min.).

National Science Museum (Kokuritsu Kahaku Hakubutsukan) *(Kids)* This is a sprawling complex, comprising three buildings and covering everything from the evolution of life to electronics in Japan. Unfortunately, most displays are in Japanese (be sure to pick up the museum's English pamphlet), but the museum is worth visiting for its exhibits relating to Japan. There are also plenty of exhibits geared toward children. Dinosaurs greet visitors on the ground floor of the main hall, while up on the third floor plants and animals of Japan are featured, including the Japanese brown bear, the Japanese crested ibis, the Japanese monkey, and marine life such as huge king crabs. Other highlights include a display on the origin, development, and history of the Japanese people; a hands-on discovery room for children exploring sound, light, magnetism, and other scientific phenomena; a map of Japan showing the location of all its active volcanoes; re-created wood and marine habitats; and an amazing room of stuffed and preserved animals, including a gorilla and other primates, bears, alligators, and a giant squid. You'll want to spend about 2 hours here, more if you have children in tow.

Ueno Park, Taitō-ku. ☎ 03/3822-0111. www.kahaku.go.jp/english. Admission ¥420 (\$3.50) adults, ¥70 (60¢) children; more for special exhibits. Tues–Sun 9am–4:30pm. Station: Ueno (5 min.).

Open-Air Folk House Museum (Nihon Minka-en) ★ *(Finds)* Located in the neighboring city of Kawasaki, 30 minutes by express train on the Odakyu Line from Shinjuku, this open-air museum is highly recommended if you won't have a chance to visit other similar museums (such as those in Takayama, Shirakawa, and Takamatsu). In a lovely setting of wooded hillsides are 23 traditional thatched houses and other historical buildings, all open to the public so you can wander in and inspect the various rooms, gaining insight into the way rural Japanese lived in centuries past. Most of the buildings are heavy-beamed thatched houses, but there are also warehouses, a samurai's residential gate, a water wheel, and a Kabuki stage from a small fishing village, all originally from other parts of Honshu and reconstructed here. The oldest houses date from about 300 years ago and were usually homes for extended families. An English pamphlet tells about each of the buildings, and there are also many explanations throughout in English. Plan on spending a half day here, including transportation back and forth.

7-1-1 Masugata, Tama-ku, Kawasaki. ☎ 044/922-2181. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) students and children. Tues-Sun 9:30am-4pm. Station: Mukogaoka Yuen (15 min.)

Ota Memorial Museum of Art (Ota Kinen Bijutsukan) ★ This great museum features the private Ukiyo-e (woodblock print) collection of the late Ota Seizo, who early in life recognized the importance of Ukiyo-e as an art form and dedicated himself to its preservation. Although the collection contains 12,000 prints, only 80 to 100 are displayed at any given time, in thematic exhibitions that change monthly and include English descriptions. The museum itself is small but delightful, with such traditional touches as bamboo screens and stone pathways. You can tour the museum in about 30 minutes.

1-10-10 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3403-0880. www.ukiyoe-ota-muse.jp. Admission ¥700 - ¥1,000 (\$5.85-\$8.35) adults, ¥500 - ¥700 (\$4.15-\$5.85) high-school and college students, ¥200 - ¥500 (\$1.65-\$4.15) junior-high students, free to ¥200 (free to \$1.65) children; price depends on the exhibit. Tues-Sun 10:30am-5:30pm (enter by 5pm). Closed from the 27th to the end of each month. Station: Harajuku (2 min.) or Meiji-Jingumae (1 min.). Near the Omotesando Dori and Meiji Dori intersection, behind La Forêt.

Yushukan ★ Located on the grounds of Yasukuni Shrine, built in 1869 to commemorate some 2.5 million Japanese war dead, this war memorial museum chronicles the rise and fall of the samurai, Sino-Japanese War, Russo-Japanese War, and World Wars I and II, though English explanations are rather vague and Japan's military aggression in Asia is glossed over. Still, an interesting 90 minutes can be spent here gazing at samurai armor, uniforms, tanks, guns, and artillery, as well as such thought-provoking displays as a human torpedo (a tiny submarine guided by one occupant and loaded with explosives) and a suicide attack plane. But the most chilling displays are the seemingly endless photographs of war dead, some of them young teenagers. In stark contrast to the somberness of the museum, temporary exhibits of beautiful ikebana (Japanese flower arrangements) and bonsai are often held on shrine grounds in rows of glass cases.

Yasukuni Shrine, 3-1-1 Kudan-kita, Chiyoda-ku. ☎ 03/3261-8326. www.yasukuni.or.jp. Admission ¥800 (\$6.65) adults, ¥500 (\$4.15) high-school and college students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Daily 9am-5:30pm (to 5pm Nov-Feb). Station: Kudanshita (3 min.); Ichigayaumae or Iidabashi (7 min.). On Yasukuni Dori.

5 Spectacular City Views

Tokyo Metropolitan Government Office (TMG) ★★ ★ Kids Tokyo's city hall—designed by one of Japan's most well-known architects, Kenzo Tange—is an impressive addition to the skyscrapers of west Shinjuku. Three buildings comprise the complex—TMG no. 1, TMG no. 2, and the Metropolitan Assembly Building—and together they contain everything from Tokyo's Disaster Prevention Center to the governor's office. Most important for visitors is TMG no. 1, the tall building to the north that offers one of the best views of Tokyo. This 48-story, 240m (800-ft.) structure, the tallest building in Shinjuku, boasts two observatories located on the 45th floors of both its North and South towers, with access from the first floor. Both observatories offer the same spectacular views—on clear winter days you can even see Mount Fuji—as well as a small souvenir shop and a coffee shop. In expensive Tokyo, this is one of the city's best bargains, and kids love it. On the first floor is a Tokyo Tourist Information Center, open daily 10am to 6:30pm.

2-8-1 Nishi-Shinjuku. ☎ 03/5321-1111. www.tokyotower.co.jp. Free admission. Daily 9:30am-10pm. Closed Dec 29-Jan 3. Station: Tochomae (1 min.), Shinjuku (10 min.), or Nishi-Shinjuku (4 min.).

Tokyo Tower ★ *Overrated* Japan's most famous observation tower was built in 1958 and was modeled after the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Lit up at night, this 330m (1,099-ft.) tower, a relay station for TV and radio stations, is a familiar and beloved landmark in the city's landscape; but with the construction of skyscrapers over the past few decades (including the TMG, above, with its free observatory), it has lost some of its appeal as an observation platform and seems more like a relic from the 1950s. With its tacky souvenir shops and assorted small-time attractions, this place is as about as kitsch as kitsch can be.

The tower has two observatories: the main one at 149m (495 ft.), and the top observatory at 248m (825 ft.). The best time of year for viewing is said to be during Golden Week at the beginning of May. With many Tokyoites gone from the city and most factories and businesses closed down, the air at this time is thought to be the cleanest and clearest. There are several offbeat tourist attractions in the tower's base building, including a wax museum (where you can see the Beatles, a wax rendition of Leonardo's *Last Supper*, Hollywood stars, and a medieval torture chamber), a small aquarium, a museum of holography, and a trick art gallery, all with separate admission fees and appealing mainly to children.

4-2 Shiba Koen, Minato-ku. ☎ 03/3433-5111. www.tokyotower.co.jp. Admission to main observatory ¥820 (\$6.85) adults and ¥460 (\$3.85) children; top observatory ¥1,420 (\$12) adults and ¥860 (\$7.15) children. Daily 9am-10pm. Station: Onarimon or Kamiyacho (6 min.).

6 City Strolls

SEARCHING FOR OLD EDO

A WALKING TOUR OF ASAKUSA

Start:	Hama Rikyu Garden (Shiodome Station) or Asakusa Station (exit 1 or 3).
Finish:	Kappabashi Dori (station: Tawaramachi).
Time:	Allow approximately 5 hours, including the boat ride.
Best Times:	Tuesday through Friday, when the crowds aren't as big.
Worst Times:	Sunday, when Demboin Garden and the shops on Kappabashi Dori are closed.

If anything remains of old Tokyo, Asakusa is it. This is where you'll find narrow streets lined with small residential homes, women in kimono, Tokyo's oldest and most popular temple, and quaint shops selling boxwood combs, fans, kitchen knives, sweet pastries, and other products of yore. With its temple market, rickshaw drivers vying for the tourist trade, old-fashioned amusement park, traditional shops, and restaurants, Asakusa preserves the charm of old downtown Edo better than anyplace else in Tokyo. For many older Japanese, a visit to Asakusa is like stepping back to the days of their childhood; for tourists, it provides a glimpse of the way things were.

Pleasure-seekers have been flocking to Asakusa for centuries. Originating as a temple town back in the 7th century, it grew in popularity during the Tokugawa regime as merchants grew wealthy and whole new forms of popular entertainment arose to cater to them. Theaters for Kabuki and Bunraku flourished in Asakusa, as did restaurants and shops. By 1840, Asakusa had become Edo's main entertainment district. In stark contrast to the solemnity surrounding places of worship in the West, Asakusa's temple market had a carnival atmosphere reminiscent of medieval Europe, complete with street performers and exotic animals. It retains some of that festive atmosphere even today.

The most dramatic way to arrive in Asakusa is by boat from Hama Rikyu Garden (see stop no. 1 below), just as people used to arrive in the olden days. If you want to forgo the boat ride, take the subway to Asakusa Station and start your tour from there. Otherwise, head to:

① Hama Rikyu Garden

The garden is at the south end of Tokyo (station: Shiodome, exit 5, then a 5-min. walk). Considered by some to be Tokyo's finest garden, it was laid out during the Edo Period in a style popular at the time, in which surrounding scenery was incorporated into its composition. (See p. 183 for more details.)

Boats depart the garden to make their way along the Sumida River hourly or more frequently between 10:20am and 3:50pm, with the fare to Asakusa costing ¥620 (\$5.15). Although much of what you see along the working river today is only concrete embankments, I recommend the trip because it affords a different perspective of Tokyo—barges making their way down the river, high-rise apartment buildings with laundry fluttering from balconies, warehouses, and superhighways. The boat passes under approximately a dozen bridges during the 40-minute trip, each one completely different. During cherry-blossom season, thousands of cherry trees lining the bank make the trip particularly memorable.

Upon your arrival in Asakusa, walk away from the boat pier a couple of blocks inland, where you'll soon see the colorful Kaminarimon Gate. Across the street is the:

② Asakusa Information Center

Located at 2-18-9 Kaminarimon (☎ 03/3842-5566), the center is open daily from 9:30am to 8pm and is staffed by English-speaking volunteers from 10am to 5pm. Stop here to pick up a map of the area and to ask directions to restaurants and sights. In addition, note the huge Seiko clock on

the center's facade—a musical clock that performs (mechanical dolls reenact scenes from several of Asakusa's most famous festivals) every hour on the hour from 10am to 7pm.

Then it's time to head across the street to the:

③ Kaminarimon Gate

The gate is unmistakable with its bright red colors and 100-kilogram (220-lb.) lantern hanging in the middle. The statues inside the gate are the god of wind to the right and the god of thunder to the left, ready to protect the deity enshrined in the temple. The god of thunder is particularly fearsome—he supposedly has an insatiable appetite for navel.

To the left of the gate, on the corner, is:

④ Tokiwado Kaminari Okoshi

This open-fronted confectionery has been selling rice-based *okoshi* for 250 years and is popular with visiting Japanese buying gifts for the folks back home. It's open daily from 9am to 9pm.

Once past Kaminarimon Gate, you'll find yourself immediately on a pedestrian lane called:

⑤ Nakamise Dori

The lane leads straight to the Sensoji Temple. *Nakamise* means “inside shops,” and historical records show that vendors have sold wares here since the late 17th century. Today Nakamise Dori is lined on both sides with tiny stall after tiny stall, many owned by the same family for generations. If you're expecting austere religious artifacts, however, you're in for a surprise: sweets, shoes, barking toy dogs, Japanese crackers (called *sembei*), bags, umbrellas, Japanese dolls, T-shirts, fans, masks, and traditional Japanese accessories are all sold. How about a brightly colored straight hairpin—and a black hairpiece to go with it? Or a temporary tattoo in the shape of a dragon? This is a great place to shop

Walking Tour 1—Asakusa



1 Hama Rikyu Garden	7 Demboin Garden
2 Asakusa Information Center	8 Incense burner
3 Kaminarimon Gate	9 Sensoji Temple
4 Tokiwado Kaminari Okoshi	10 Asakusa Jinja Shrine
5 Nakamise Dori	11 Hanayashiki
6 Five-Story Pagoda	12 Kappabashi-dougugai Dori

for souvenirs, gifts, and items you have no earthly need for—a little bit of unabashed consumerism on the way to spiritual purification.



TAKE A BREAK

If you're hungry for lunch, there are a number of possibilities in the neighborhood.

Chinya, 1–3–4 Asakusa, just west of Kaminarimon Gate on Kaminarimon Dori, has been serving sukiyaki and shabu-shabu since 1880. To the south of Kaminarimon Gate is **Namiki Yabusoba**, 2–11–9 Kaminarimon, Asakusa's best-known noodle shop. For Western food, head to the other side of the Sumida River, where on the 22nd floor of the Asahi Beer Tower is **La Ranarita Azumabashi**, 1–23–1 Azumabashi, a moderately priced Italian restaurant with great views of Asakusa. (See p. 153, 154, and 152 for complete reviews.)

Near the end of Nakamise Dori, as you head toward the temple, you'll pass a kindergarten on your left, followed by a five-story red-and-gold:

6 Pagoda

This is a 1970 remake of a pagoda constructed during the time of the third shogun, Iemitsu, in the 17th century.

A low-lying building connected to the pagoda is the gateway to the gem of this tour: a **hidden garden**, one of Asakusa's treasures, just a stone's throw from Nakamise Dori but barely visible on the other side of the kindergarten. Most visitors to Asakusa pass it by, unaware of its existence, primarily because it isn't open to the general public. However, anyone can visit Demboin Garden simply by entering the building connected to the pagoda at the left to ask for permission. Go inside, turn right, and walk to the third door to the left; you'll be asked to sign your name and will be given a map showing the entrance to the garden, which is open Monday through

Saturday from 9am to 3pm. However, because the garden is on private grounds belonging to Demboin Monastery, it's often closed for functions. (Call ☎ 03/3842-0181 to see whether it's open, or trust to luck.)

Once you've obtained permission, retrace your steps down Nakamise past the kindergarten, take the first right onto Demboin Dori, and then enter the second gate on your right. This is the entrance to:

7 Demboin Garden

The gate to Demboin Garden (also spelled Dempoin Garden) may be locked. If so, ring the doorbell to be let in. Soon you'll find yourself in a peaceful oasis in the midst of bustling Asakusa, in a countryside setting that centers on a pond filled with carp and turtles. Enshu Kobori, a tea-ceremony master and famous landscape gardener who also designed a garden for the shogun's castle, designed the garden in the 17th century. Because most people are unaware that the garden exists or that it's accessible, you may find yourself the sole visitor. The best view is from the far side of the pond, where you can see the temple building and pagoda above the trees.

Return to Nakamise Dori and resume your walk north to the second gate, which opens onto a square filled with pigeons and a large:

8 Incense Burner

This is where worshippers "wash" themselves to ward off or help cure illness. If, for example, you have a sore throat, be sure to rub some of the smoke over your throat for good measure. But the dominant building of the square is:

9 Sensoji Temple

Sensoji is Tokyo's oldest temple. Founded in the 7th century and therefore already well established long before Tokugawa settled in Edo, Sensoji Temple is dedicated to Kannon, the Buddhist goddess of mercy, and is therefore popularly called the Asakusa

Kannon Temple. According to legend, the temple was founded after two fishermen pulled a golden statue of Kannon from the sea. The sacred statue is still housed in the temple, carefully preserved inside three boxes; even though it's never on display, people still flock to the temple to pay their respects.

Within the temple is a counter where you can buy your fortune by putting a 100-yen coin into a wooden box and shaking it until a long bamboo stick emerges from a small hole. The stick will have a Japanese number on it, which corresponds to one of the numbers on a set of drawers. Take the fortune, written in both English and Japanese, from the drawer that has your number. But don't expect the translation to clear things up; my fortune contained such cryptic messages as "Getting a beautiful lady at your home, you want to try all people know about this" and "Stop to start a trip." If you find that your fortune raises more questions than it answers or you simply don't like what it has to say, you can conveniently negate it by tying it to one of the wires provided for this purpose just outside the main hall.

If you walk around the temple to the right, on the northeast corner of the grounds is the small orange:

⑩ Asakusa Jinja Shrine

This shrine was built in 1649 by Iemitsu Tokugawa, the third Tokugawa shogun, to commemorate the two fishermen who found the statue of Kannon and their village chief. Its architectural style, called *Gongen-zukuri*, is the same as the style of Toshogu Shrine in Nikko. West of Sensoji Temple is a gardenlike area of lesser shrines and memorials, flowering bushes, and a stream filled with carp. Farther west still is:

⑪ Hanayashiki

This is a small and corny amusement park that first opened in 1853 and still draws in the little ones. (See p. 197 for more details.)

Most of the area west of Sensoji Temple (the area to the left if you stand facing the front of the temple) is a small but interesting part of Asakusa popular among Tokyo's older working class. This is where several of Asakusa's old-fashioned pleasure houses remain, including bars, restaurants, strip shows, traditional Japanese vaudeville, and so-called "love hotels," which rent rooms by the hour.

If you keep walking west, past the Asakusa View Hotel, within 10 minutes you'll reach:

⑫ Kappabashi-dougugai Dori

This district, generally referred to as Kappabashi Dori, is Tokyo's wholesale district for restaurant items. Shop after shop sells pottery, chairs, tableware, cookware, lacquerware, rice cookers, noren (short curtains hung outside shops and restaurants to signify they are open), and everything else needed to run a restaurant. And yes, you can even buy those models of plastic food you've been drooling over in restaurant displays. Ice cream, pizza, sushi, mugs foaming with beer—they're all here, looking like the real thing. (Stores close about 5pm.)



WINDING DOWN

The **Asakusa View Hotel**, on Kokusai Dori Avenue between Sensoji Temple and Kappabashi Dori, has several restaurants and bars. In the basement is the clubby **Ice House**, the hotel's main bar, while on the top floor is the **Belvedere Lounge**, open from 5:30pm with views of Asakusa (live music and cover charge after 7:30pm).

IN THE HEART OF
TRENDY TOKYO

A STROLL THROUGH HARAJUKU & AOYAMA

Start:	Meiji Jingu Shrine (station: Harajuku).
Finish:	Aoyama (station: Omotesando).
Time:	Allow approximately 4 hours.
Best Times:	The first and fourth Sundays of every month, when there's an antiques/flea market at Togo Shrine.
Worst Times:	Monday, from the 27th to the end of every month (when the Ota Memorial Museum of Art is closed), and Thursday (when the Oriental Bazaar is closed).

Harajuku is one of my favorite neighborhoods in Tokyo, though I'm too old to really fit in. In fact, anyone over 25 is apt to feel ancient here, since this is Tokyo's most popular hangout for Japanese high-school and college students. The young come here to see and be seen; you're sure to spot Japanese punks, girls decked out in the fashions of the moment, and young couples out on dates. I like Harajuku for its vibrancy, its sidewalk cafes, its street hawkers, and its trendy clothing boutiques. It's also the home of Tokyo's most important Shinto shrine, as well as a delightful woodblock-print museum and an excellent souvenir shop of traditional Japanese items.

Nearby is **Aoyama**, a yuppified version of Harajuku, where the upwardly mobile dine and shop for designer clothing. Connecting Harajuku and Aoyama is **Omotesando Dori**, a wide, tree-lined, European-style shopping boulevard that forms the heart of this area; its many sidewalk cafes make it a popular promenade for people-watching.

From Harajuku Station, take the south exit (the one closer to Shibuya) and turn right over the bridge, where you will immediately see the huge cypress torii marking the entrance to:

① Meiji Jingu Shrine

This is the most venerable shrine in Tokyo (p. 175), dedicated to Emperor and Empress Meiji. On the 10-minute walk along the tree-shaded path to the shrine, stop off at the Iris Garden, spectacular for its irises in June.



TAKE A BREAK

If the hike to Meiji Shrine has made you thirsty, stop off at the rustic, outdoor snack pavilion just inside the entranceway to the shrine grounds. It offers coffee, beer, and ice cream and is open daily from 9am to sunset.

you'll see groups of teenagers—many bizarrely dressed—gathered on the bridge over the train tracks. They're all that's left of the masses of teens that used to congregate on nearby Yoyogi Dori back when it was closed to vehicular traffic on Sundays. Sadly, authorities decided to open Yoyogi and Omotesando Dori streets to traffic, thereby putting an end to Tokyo's most happening Sunday scene.

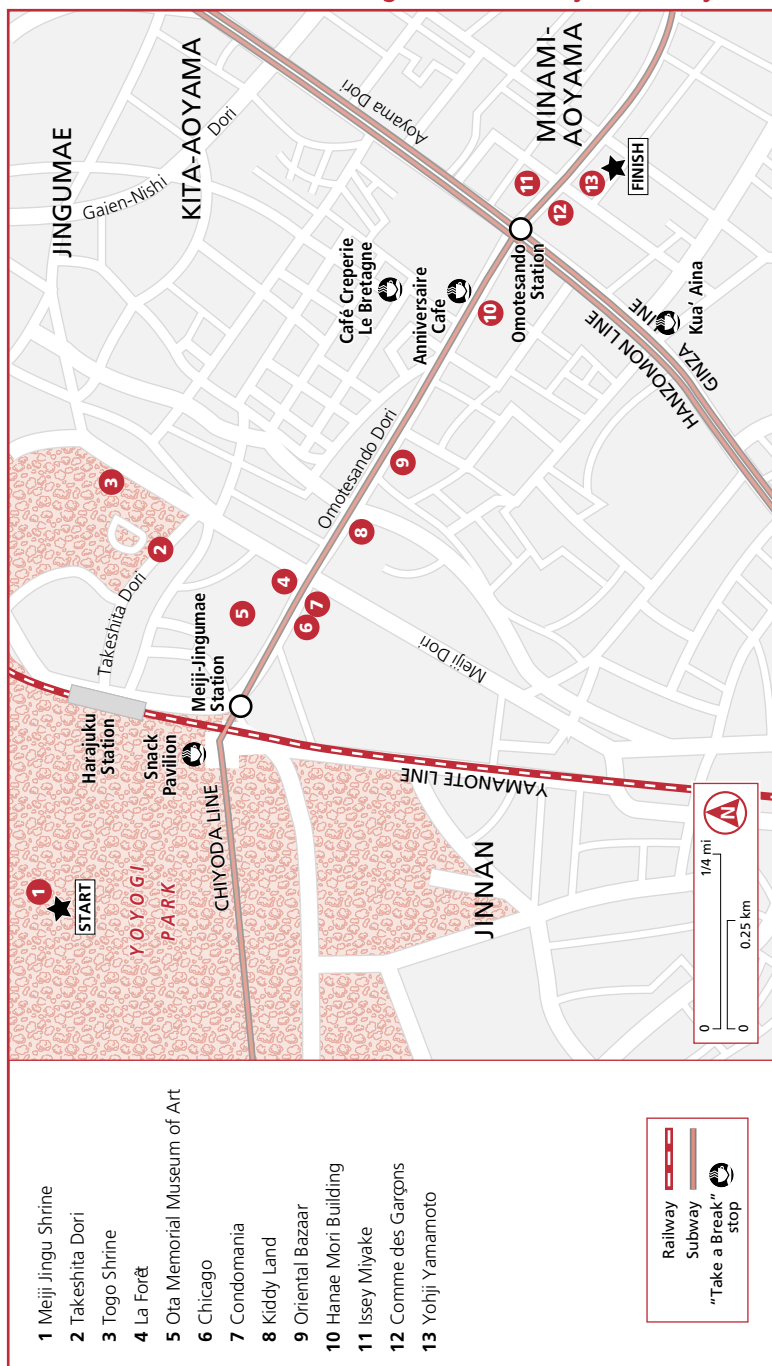
At Harajuku Station, continue walking north beside the station to its north exit. Across the street from Harajuku Station's north exit is:

② Takeshita Dori

This pedestrian-only street is lined nonstop with stores that cater to teenagers. It's packed—especially on Sunday afternoons—with young people hunting for bargains on inexpensive clothing, shoes, music, sunglasses, jewelry, watches, cosmetics, and more.

After visiting the shrine, retrace your steps to Harajuku Station. If it's Sunday,

Walking Tour 2—Harajuku & Aoyama



After inching your way through the flow of humanity along this narrow lane, you'll eventually find yourself on a busy thoroughfare, Meiji Dori. If it's the first or fourth Sunday of the month, turn left (north) onto Meiji Dori. In a couple minutes, on your left you'll see:

3 Togo Shrine

Togo Shrine is dedicated to Admiral Togo, who was in charge of the fleet that defeated the Russian navy in 1905 in the Russo-Japanese War. Nowadays, the shrine is most popular for its flea market held the first and fourth Sundays of every month, when everything from old chests, dolls, porcelain, and kimono are for sale, all spread out on a tree-shaded sidewalk that meanders around the shrine.

Head back south on Meiji Dori. To your right, just before the big intersection, is:

4 La Forêt

La Forêt is filled with trendy shoe and clothing boutiques. The less expensive boutiques tend to be on the lower floors; the more exclusive are higher up. (See "Shopping," later in this chapter, for details on many of the shops and department stores listed in this walking tour.)

Behind La Forêt is one of my favorite museums, the:

5 Ota Memorial Museum of Art

This museum at 1-10-10 Jingumae features the private Ukiyo-e (woodblock prints) collection of the late Ota Seizo. (See p. 188 for more.)

Across Omotesando Dori is:

6 Chicago

This store specializes in used American clothing but also stocks hundreds of used and new kimono and yukata in a corner of its basement.

Near La Forêt is Harajuku's major intersection, Meiji Dori and Omotesando Dori. Here, on the intersection near Chicago, is one of Harajuku's more unusual shops:

7 Condomania

This store at 6-30-1 Jingumae sells condoms in a wide range of sizes, colors,

and styles, from glow-in-the-dark to scented. It's open daily 10am to 11pm.

Heading east on Omotesando Dori (away from Harajuku Station), you'll soon see, to your right:

8 Kiddy Land

Located at 6-1-9 Jingumae, this store sells gag gifts and a great deal more than just toys, including enough to amuse non-discerning adults. You could spend an hour browsing here, but the store is so crowded with teenagers that you may end up rushing for the door.

Continue east on Omotesando Dori (where sidewalk vendors selling jewelry and ethnic accessories set up shop on weekends); to your right will soon be Harajuku's most famous store:

9 Oriental Bazaar

At 5-9-13 Jingumae, you'll find the Oriental Bazaar, Tokyo's best one-stop shopping for Japanese souvenirs. Four floors offer antique chinaware, old kimono, Japanese paper products, fans, jewelry, woodblock prints, dolls, screens, china, and much more, all at reasonable prices. I always stock up on gifts here for the folks back home.

Continue walking east on Omotesando Dori, past the construction area on your left (soon to be a residential and commercial complex designed by Tadao Ando). Near the end of Omotesando Dori, to your right, is the:

10 Hanae Mori Building

This building was designed by Japanese architect Kenzo Tange (who also designed the Akasaka Prince Hotel and the TMG city hall in Shinjuku). It houses the entire collection of the designer Hanae Mori, from casual wear to evening wear. In the basement is the Antique Market where individual stalls sell china, jewelry, clothing, watches, swords, and items from the 1930s.



TAKE A BREAK

Harajuku and Aoyama have more sidewalk cafes than any other part of Tokyo. Most conspicuous is the fancy **Anniversaire Café**, 3–5–30 Kita-Aoyama, across from the Hanae Mori Building (see no. 10, above). If you backtrack a bit and take the small side street that runs beside McDonald's (underneath the "Harajuku" arch) and then turn left, you'll come to **Café Creperie Le Bretagne**, 4–9–8 Jingumae, selling buckwheat *galettes* and crepes filled with fruit and chocolate combinations.

At the end of Omotesando Dori, where it connects with Aoyama Dori, is Omotesando Station. You can board the subway here or, for more shopping, cross Aoyama Dori and continue heading east, where you'll pass a number of designer shops. First, on the left at 3–18–11 Minami-aoyama, is:

11 Issey Miyake

The clothes here are known for their richness in texture and fabrics.

To the right, at 5–2–1 Minami-Aoyama, is:

12 Comme des Garçons

Rei Kawakubo's designs for both men and women are showcased here.

Farther down the street, on the right at 5–3–6 Minami-Aoyama, is:

13 Yohji Yamamoto

As with all Yamamoto shops, this store has an interesting avant-garde interior.



WINDING DOWN

The cafes listed above are just a few minutes' walk away, but if you're dying for a burger, look no farther than **Kua' Aina**, 5–10–21 Minami Aoyama, on the corner of the Aoyama Dori and Kotto Dori intersection. It boasts the most satisfying burgers in town, along with sandwiches and soft drinks.

7 Especially for Kids

In addition to its observatories, **Tokyo Tower** (p. 189) contains a few other attractions that might be worth a visit if you have children in tow, including a small **aquarium** and a **wax museum**. Other attractions listed earlier that are good for children include the **Edo-Tokyo Museum**, **Fukagawa Edo Museum**, **National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation**, and **National Science Museum**.

Hanayashiki Opened in 1853, this small and rather corny amusement park is Japan's oldest. It offers a small roller coaster, a kiddie Ferris wheel, a carousel, a haunted house, a 3-D theater, and other diversions that appeal to children. Note, however, that after paying admission, you must still buy tickets for each ride; tickets are ¥100 (85¢) each, and most rides require two or three.

2–28–1 Asakusa (northwest of Sensoji Temple), Taito-ku. ☎ 043/3842-8780. Admission ¥900 (\$7.50) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) children 5–12 and seniors, free for children 4 and younger. Wed–Mon 10:30am–6pm (5pm in winter). Station: Asakusa (5 min.).

Joypolis Sega Bored teenagers in tow, grumbling at yet another temple or shrine? Bring them to life at Tokyo's most sophisticated virtual amusement arcade, outfitted with the latest in video games and high-tech virtual-reality attractions, courtesy of Sega. Video games include bobsledding and car races, in which participants maneuver curves utilizing virtual-reality equipment, as well numerous aeronautical battle games. There's also a 3-D sightseeing tour with seats that move with the action on the screen, several virtual reality rides (sky-diving, anyone?), and much, much more. Most harmless are the Print Club

machines, which will print your face on stickers with the background (Mount Fuji, perhaps?) of your choice. If you think your kids will want to try everything, you can buy them a passport for ¥3,300 (\$28).

Tokyo Decks, 3rd floor, Odaiba. ☎ 03/5500-1801. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) children; individual attractions an additional ¥200–¥700 (\$1.65–\$5.85) each. Daily 10am–11pm. Station: Odaiba Kaihin Koen (2 min.).

National Children's Castle (Kodomo-no-Shiro) ★ Here's a great place to bring the kids. Conceived by the Ministry of Health and Welfare to commemorate the International Year of the Child in 1979, the Children's Castle holds various activity rooms designed to appeal to children of all ages. The third floor, designed for spontaneous and unstructured play, features a large climbing gym, a computer playroom, building blocks, a playhouse, dolls, books, and a teen corner with table tennis and other age-appropriate games; there's also an art room staffed with instructors to help children with projects suitable to their ages. On the fourth floor is a music room, which holds mini-concerts and special events and also has instruments the kids are invited to play (during my last visit, a band composed of junior-high-age kids was playing for an enthusiastic audience of dancing toddlers) as well as a video room with private cubicles where visitors can make selections from a stocked library of English and Japanese videos. On the roof is an outdoor playground complete with tricycles and a small, toddler wading pool (¥200/\$1.65 extra), while in the basement is the family swimming pool (¥300/\$2.50 for adults, ¥200/\$1.65 for children). Various programs are presented throughout the week, including puppet shows, fairy tales, and origami presentations.

5–53-1 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3797-5666. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) children 3–17, free for children under 3. Tues–Fri 12:30–5:30pm; Sat–Sun and holidays (including school holidays) 10am–5:30pm. Station: Omotesando (exit B2, 8 min.) or Shibuya (10 min.). On Aoyama Dori between Omotesando and Shibuya stations.

Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo DisneySea ★★ ★ If you (or your kids) have your heart set on visiting all the world's Disney parks, head to **Tokyo Disneyland**. Virtually a carbon copy of the back-home version, this one also boasts the Jungle Cruise, Pirates of the Caribbean, Haunted Mansion, and Space Mountain. Other hot attractions include Toontown, a wacky theme park where Mickey, Minnie, Donald, and other Disney characters work and play; Micro-Adventure, which features 3-D glasses and various special effects; and Star Tours, a thrill adventure created by Disney and George Lucas.

Opened in 2001 adjacent to Disneyland, **DisneySea**, a theme park based on ocean legends and myths, offers seven distinct “ports of call,” including the futuristic Port Discovery marina with its StormRider which flies straight into the eye of a storm; Lost River Delta with its Indiana Jones Adventure; Mermaid Lagoon based on the film *The Little Mermaid*; and the Arabian Coast, with its Sinbad's Seven Voyages boat ride.

1-1 Maihama, Urayasu-shi, Chiba. ☎ 045/683-3777. www.tokyodisneyresort.co.jp. 1-day passport to either Disneyland or DisneySea, including entrance to and use of all attractions ¥5,500 (\$46) adults, ¥4,800 (\$40) seniors and junior-high and high-school students, ¥3,700 (\$31) children 4–11, free for children under 4. Starlight admission after 3pm on weekends to Disneyland, ¥4,500 (\$38), ¥3,900 (\$31), and ¥3,000 (\$25) respectively. Disneyland, daily 8 or 9am to 9 or 10pm, with slightly shorter hours in winter. DisneySea, daily 8am–10pm in summer, 10am–7pm in winter. Tickets can be purchased in advance at the Tokyo Disneyland Reservation Center, Hibiya Mitsui Building, 1–1–2 Yurakucho (☎ 03/3595-1777; station: Hibiya). Station: Maihama Station on the JR Keiyo Line from Tokyo Station (1 min.).

Ueno Zoo Founded back in 1882, Japan's oldest zoo is small by today's standards but remains one of the most well-known zoos in Japan, due in part to its

giant panda, donated by the Chinese government to mark the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries following World War II. A vivarium, opened in 1999, houses amphibians, fish, and reptiles including Komodo dragons, green tree pythons, and dwarf crocodiles. Personally, I can't help but feel sorry for some of the animals in their small spaces, but children will enjoy the Japanese macaques, polar bears, California sea lions, penguins, gorillas, giraffes, zebras, elephants, tigers, and petting zoo. Expect to spend a minimum of 2 hours here.

Ueno Park, Taito-ku. ☎ 03/3828-5171. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) seniors, ¥200 (\$1.65) children 12–14, free for children under 12. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm (enter by 4pm). Closed some holidays. Station: Ueno (4 min.).

8 Spectator Sports

For information on current sporting events taking place in Tokyo, ranging from kickboxing and pro wrestling to soccer, table tennis, martial arts, and golf classics, contact the Tourist Information Center.

SUMO Sumo matches are held in Tokyo at the **Kokugikan**, 1–3–28 Yokoami, Sumida-ku (☎ 03/3623-5111; station: Ryogoku, then a 1-min. walk). Matches are held in January, May, and September for 15 consecutive days, beginning at around 10am and lasting until 6pm; the top wrestlers compete after 3:30pm. The best seats are ringside box seats, but they're bought out by companies and by friends and families of sumo wrestlers. Usually available are balcony seats, which can be purchased at **Ticket Pia** (☎ 03/5237-9999). You can also purchase tickets directly at the Kokugikan ticket office beginning at 9am every morning of the tournament. Prices range from about ¥2,100 (\$18) for an unreserved seat (sold on the day of the event) to ¥8,200 (\$68) for a good reserved seat.

If you can't make it to a match, watching on TV is almost as good. Tournaments in Tokyo, as well as those that take place annually in Osaka, Nagoya, and Fukuoka, are broadcast on the NHK channel from 4 to 6pm daily during matches.

9 Shopping

It won't take you long to become convinced that shopping is the number one pastime in Tokyo. Women, men, couples, and even whole families go on buying expeditions in their free time, making Sunday the most crowded shopping day of the week.

THE SHOPPING SCENE

BEST BUYS Tokyo is the country's showcase for everything from the latest in camera, computer, or stereo equipment to original woodblock prints. Traditional Japanese crafts and souvenirs that make good buys include toys (both traditional and the latest in technical wizardry), kites, Japanese dolls, carp banners, swords, lacquerware, bamboo baskets, ikebana accessories, ceramics, chopsticks, fans, masks, knives, scissors, sake, and silk and cotton kimono. And you don't have to spend a fortune: You can pick up handmade Japanese paper (*washi*) products, such as umbrellas, lanterns, boxes, stationery, and other souvenirs for a fraction of what they would cost in import shops at home. In Harajuku, it's possible to buy a fully lined dress in the latest fashion for \$75, and I can't even count the number of pairs of fun, casual shoes I've bought in Tokyo for a mere \$40. Used cameras can be picked up for a song, reproductions of famous woodblock prints

For It's Ichi, Ni, San Strikes You're Out . . .

The Japanese are so crazy about baseball, you'd think they invented the game. Actually, it was introduced to Japan by the United States way back in 1873. Today, it's as popular among Japanese as it is among Americans. Even the annual high-school playoffs keep everyone glued to the TV set.

As with other imports, the Japanese have added their own modifications: Some of the playing fields are smaller (though newer ones tend to have American dimensions) and, borrowing from American football, each team has its own cheerleaders. There are several American players who have proved very popular with local fans; but according to the rules, no more than four foreigners may play on any one team. On the other hand, recent years have also seen an exodus of top Japanese players defecting to American teams, including the hugely popular and successful Suzuki Ichiro, leadoff hitter and right fielder for the Seattle Mariners; and Matsui Hideki, a power-hitting outfielder with the New York Yankees. In fact, Japanese fans have been so mesmerized by the Mariners and Yankees (whose games are broadcast on Japanese TV) that television ratings for Japanese games have fallen.

Although playing one's hardest is at a premium in the United States, in Japan, any attempt at excelling individually is frowned upon. As in other aspects of life, it is the group, the team, that counts. To what extent that's so may be illustrated by the case of an American player: When he missed opening day at training camp due to a life-or-death operation on his son at a hospital, his contract was immediately canceled. And rather than let a foreign player excel by breaking the hitting record set by a Japanese, American Randy Bass was thrown only balls and walked.

There are two professional leagues, the Central and the Pacific, which play from April to October and meet in the final Japan Series playoffs. In Tokyo, the home teams are the **Yomiuri Giants** and the **Nippon Ham Fighters**, both of which play at the Tokyo Dome (☎ 03/3811-2111; station: Suidobashi); and the **Yakult Swallows**, which play at Jingu Stadium (station: Gaenmae). Other teams playing in the vicinity of Tokyo are the **Chiba Lotte Marines**, who play at Kawasaki Stadium, Kanagawa (☎ 044/244-1171; station: Kawasaki on the JR Tokaido Line, then by bus no. 16, 19, 21, 22, or 23); the **Seibu Lions**, Seibu Lions Stadium, Tokorozawa City (☎ 0429/24-1151; station: JR to Seibu Kyujo-mae on the Seibu Sayama Line); and the **Yokohama Bay Stars**, Yokohama Stadium, Yokohama (☎ 045/661-1251; station: Kannai on the JR Keihin Tohoku Line). Advance tickets go on sale Friday, 2 weeks prior to the game, and can be purchased at the stadium or, for Tokyo teams, at **Ticket Pia** (☎ 03/5237-9999). Prices for the Tokyo Dome and Jingu Stadium range from ¥1,800 (\$15) for an unreserved seat in the outfield to ¥6,000 (\$50) for seats behind home plate. The Giants are so popular, however, that tickets are hard to come by.

make great inexpensive gifts, and many items—from pearls to electronic video and audio equipment—can be bought tax free (see “Taxes,” below).

Japan is famous for its electronics, but if you’re buying new, you can probably find these products just as cheaply, or even more cheaply, in the United States. If you think you want to shop for electronic products while you’re in Tokyo, it pays to do some comparison shopping before you leave home so you can spot a deal when you see one. On the other hand, one of the joys of shopping for electronics in Japan is discovering new, advanced models; you might decide you want that new Sony device simply because it’s the coolest thing you’ve ever seen, no matter what the price.

GREAT SHOPPING AREAS Another enjoyable aspect of shopping in Tokyo is that specific areas are often devoted to certain goods, sold wholesale but also available to the individual shopper. **Kappabashi Dori** (station: Tawaramachi), for example, is where you’ll find shops specializing in kitchenware, while **Kanda** (station: Jimbocho) is known for its bookstores. **Akihabara** (station: Akihabara) is packed with stores selling the latest in electronics. **Ginza** (station: Ginza) is the chic address for clothing boutiques as well as art galleries. **Aoyama** (station: Omotesando) boasts the city’s largest concentration of designer clothing stores, while nearby **Harajuku** (stations: Harajuku, Meiji-Jingumae, or Omotesando) and **Shibuya** (station: Shibuya) are the places to go for youthful, fun, and inexpensive fashions.

SALES Department stores have sales throughout the year, during which you can pick up bargains on everything from electronic goods and men’s suits to golf clubs, toys, kitchenware, food, and lingerie; there are even sales for used wedding kimono. The most popular sales are for **designer clothing**, usually held twice a year in July and December or January. Here you can pick up fantastic clothing at cut-rate prices—but be prepared for the crowds. Sales are generally held on one of the top floors of the department store in what’s usually labeled the “Exhibition Hall” or “Promotion Hall” in the store’s English brochure. Stop by the department store’s information desk, usually located near the main entrance, for the English brochure as well as flyers listing their sale promotions.

TAXES Remember that a 5% consumption tax will be added to the price marked, but all major department stores in Tokyo will refund the tax to foreign visitors if total purchases amount to more than ¥10,001 (\$83) on that day. Exemptions include food, beverages, tobacco, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, film, and batteries. When you’ve completed your shopping, take the purchased goods and receipts to the tax-refund counter in the store. There are forms to fill out (you will need your passport). Upon completion, a record of your purchase is placed on the visa page of your passport and you are given the tax refund on the spot. When leaving Japan, make sure you have your purchases with you; you may be asked by Customs to show them (pack them in your carry-on), though I have never been asked.

SHIPPING IT HOME Many first-class hotels in Tokyo provide a packing and shipping service. In addition, most large department stores, as well as tourist shops such as the Oriental Bazaar and antiques shops, will ship your purchases overseas.

If you wish to ship packages yourself, the easiest method is to go to a post office and purchase an easy-to-assemble cardboard box, available in various sizes

(along with the necessary tape). Keep in mind that packages mailed abroad cannot weigh more than 20 kilograms (about 44 lb.) and that only the larger international post offices accept packages to be mailed overseas. Remember, too, that mailing packages from Japan is expensive. Ask your hotel concierge for the closest international post office.

SHOPPING FROM A TO Z

ANTIQUES & CURIOS

In recent years, it has become a buyer-beware market in Japan, with fake antiques produced in China infiltrating the Japanese market. You shouldn't have any problems with the reputable dealers listed here, but if you're buying an expensive piece, be sure to ask whether there are any papers of authenticity.

In addition to the listings here, other places to look for antiques include the **Antique Market** in the basement of the Hanae Mori Building on Omotesando Dori (☎ 03/3406-1021; station: Omotesando, 1 min.); the second floor of the **Ginza Five** building, under the expressway at 5-1 Ginza (☎ 03/5568-2650; station: Ginza, 1 min.); the **Oriental Bazaar** (p. 204); and Tokyo's outdoor **flea markets** (see later in this section).

Antique Mall Ginza Japanese, European, and some American antiques, collectibles, and odds and ends crowd eight floors of Tokyo's largest antiques mall, where you could spend hours browsing among furniture, jewelry, watches, porcelain, pottery, dolls, scrolls, glassware, and much more, including a whole floor devoted to kimono and traditional clothing. Open Thursday through Tuesday 11am to 7pm. 1-20-15 Ginza, Chuo-ku. ☎ 03/3535-2115. Station: Higashi-Ginza or Ginza-Itchome (4 min.), on Showa Dori.

Fuji-Torii Open since 1948, this small, one-room shop in Harajuku specializes in traditional works of art and antiques, including screens, scrolls, woodblock prints, and ceramics. Open Wednesday through Monday 11am to 6pm. Closed third Monday of each month. 6-1-10 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3400-2777. Station: Meiji-jingumae (2 min.). On Omotesando Dori, next to Kiddy Land.

Kurofune *Finds* Located in a large house in Roppongi, Kurofune is owned by an American, John Adair, who for more than 25 years has specialized in Japanese antique furniture in its original condition. The largest collection here is of mid- to top-quality pieces. Browsing is a delight even if you can't afford to buy; stock includes hibachi, fabrics, prints, maps, lanterns, screens, folk art, and the country's largest collection of Japanese baskets. Fax Adair (03/3479-0719) for a map of how to get here. Open Monday through Saturday 10am to 6pm. 47-7-4 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3479-1552. Station: Roppongi (5 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk away from Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori, take the diagonal street to the left, and then take a right at the 7-Eleven.

ARCADES & SHOPPING MALLS

UNDERGROUND ARCADES Underground shopping arcades are found around several of Tokyo's train and subway stations; the biggest are at **Tokyo Station** (the Yaesu side) and **Shinjuku Station** (the east side). They often have great sales and bargains on clothing, accessories, and electronics. My only complaint is that once you're in them, it sometimes seems like you'll never find your way out again.

DUTY-FREE ARCADES Other good places to shop if you're short on time are duty-free stores. To qualify, you must present your passport, whereupon you'll be issued a piece of paper to surrender at the Customs desk when departing Japan

(the Customs desk at the Narita Airport is well marked, so you can't miss it). At that time, you may also be requested to show your purchases to Customs officials, so be sure to put them in your carry-on.

The best-known tax-free arcade is the **International Arcade** near the Imperial Hotel under the elevated JR Yamamote train tracks (☎ 03/3571-1528; station: Hibiya). It features merchandise from pearls to electronics. Narita Airport's duty-free shops, located past the security machines and Customs, are also good places to shop for alcohol. Prices aren't cheaper and selections are limited, but I usually buy my sake here before boarding the plane just so I don't have to lug it around.

SHOPPING MALLS **Sunshine City** (station: Higashi Ikebukuro or Ikebukuro) is one of Tokyo's oldest shopping malls, with more than 300 shops and restaurants spread through several adjoining buildings. Its popularity, however, is now challenged by newer and grander shopping malls in recently developed Odaiba (station: Odaiba Kaihin Koen). Palette Town is an amusement/shopping center that contains the Italian-themed **Venus Fort**, an indoor mall that evokes scenes from Italy with its store-fronted lanes, painted sky, fountains, plazas, and Italian name-brand boutiques. Nearby **Tokyo Decks** specializes in international household goods, including imports from the United States, Europe, China, and Hong Kong; I especially like its Daiba 1chome Syoutengai section on the fourth floor, a remake of mid-1900s Japan, with goods, food, songs, and TV shows of the period; and the sixth-floor Daiba Little Hong Kong department with its Chinese accessories, souvenirs, and restaurants.

BOOKS

Yasukuni Dori in Jimbocho-Kanda (station: Jimbocho) is lined with bookstores selling both new and used books, with several dealing in English-language books. Keep in mind, however, that English-language books are usually more expensive in Japan than back home. Still, no bibliophile should pass this street up. Stores are closed on Sunday; most are closed holidays as well. **Kitazawa** (☎ 03/3263-0011), the most spacious of the three listed here, boasts an overwhelming selection of books, including the most recently published novels, American and English classic literature, topical books ranging from history to politics, books on Japan, and antiquarian books. **Tokyo Random Walk** (☎ 03/3291-7071), the Tokyo branch of the Tuttle publishing firm in Vermont, carries a wide selection of books on Japan and the Far East written in English, including English translations of Japanese novels. Established in 1882, **Ohya Shobo** (☎ 03/3291-0062) doesn't have any English-language books, but it does claim to have the world's largest stock of 18th- and 19th-century Japanese illustrated books, woodblock prints, and maps, including maps from the Edo Period. (Credit cards are not accepted.)

Kinokuniya This is one of Tokyo's best-known bookstores, with one of the city's largest selections of books and magazines in English—including books on Japan, dictionaries and textbooks for students of Japanese, and novels—on its sixth floor. Open daily 10am to 8pm; closed some Wednesdays. Takashimaya Annex, Takashimaya Times Sq. complex. ☎ 03/5361-3301. Station: Shinjuku (south exit, 2 min.).

Maruzen This is Japan's oldest bookstore, founded in 1869. Its English-language section is on the fourth floor, with everything from dictionaries and travel guides to special-interest books on Japan. It also carries books on science, politics, and history, as well as magazines and paperbacks. The basement contains an office-supply shop with printing and copying services, while the fourth-floor Craft Center sells traditional handmade products of Japan. Open Monday

through Saturday 10am to 8pm; Sunday and holidays 10am to 7pm. 2–3–10 Nihombashi. ☎ 03/3272-7211. Station: Kyobashi (3 min.). On Chuo Dori across from Takashimaya department store, within walking distance of the Ginza and Tokyo stations.

Tower Records and Books My friends in Tokyo don't shop anywhere else for their books and magazines, as prices are usually lower here than elsewhere. The seventh floor is devoted to imported publications, with a good selection of English-language books, more than 3,000 different kinds of magazines, and the Sunday editions of major newspapers. Open daily 10am to 10pm; closed some Mondays. 1–22–14 Jinnan. ☎ 03/3496-3661. Station: Shibuya (Hachiko exit, 5 min.).

CRAFTS & TRADITIONAL JAPANESE PRODUCTS

If you want to shop for traditional Japanese folk crafts in the right atmosphere, nothing beats **Nakamise Dori** (station: Asakusa; 1 min.), a pedestrian lane leading to Sensoji Temple in Asakusa. It's lined with stall after stall selling souvenirs galore, from wooden geta shoes and hairpins worn by geisha to T-shirts, fans, umbrellas, toy swords, and dolls. Most are open from 10am to 6pm; some may close 1 day a week.

Another good place to search for traditional crafts are **department stores**, which usually have sections devoted to ceramics, pottery, bambooware, flower-arranging accessories, and fabrics.

Japan Sword This is the best-known sword shop in Tokyo, with an outstanding collection of fine swords, daggers, sword guards and fittings, and other sword accessories, as well as some antique samurai armor. Coming here is like visiting a museum. The place also sells copies and souvenir items of traditional swords at prices much lower than the very expensive historic swords. You can also have swords cleaned and polished here. Open Monday through Friday 9:30am to 6pm; Saturday 9:30am to 5pm. Closed holidays. 3–8–1 Toranomon, Minato-ku. ☎ 03/3434-4321. Station: Toranomon (exit 2, 5 min.).

Japan Traditional Craft Center (Zenkoku Dentoteki Kogei-hin Senta) *(Finds*

This store is worth a trip even if you can't afford to buy anything. Established to publicize and distribute information on Japanese crafts and to promote the country's artisans, the center is a great introduction to both traditional and contemporary Japanese design. It sells various top-quality crafts from all over Japan on a rotating basis, so there are always new items on hand. Crafts for sale usually include lacquerware, ceramics, fabrics, paper products, bamboo items, writing brushes and ink stones, metalwork, furniture, and sometimes even stone lanterns or Buddhist family altars. Prices are high, but rightfully so. Unfortunately, its location in out-of-the-way Ikebukuro makes a trip here feasible only if you have time; otherwise, you're probably better off shopping in the crafts section of a department store. Daily 11am to 7pm. 1st floor of Metropolitan Plaza Building, 1–11–1 Nishi-Ikebukuro. ☎ 03/5954-6066. Station: Ikebukuro (1 min.).

Oriental Bazaar If you have time for only one souvenir shop in Tokyo, this should be it. This is the city's best-known and largest souvenir/crafts store, selling products at reasonable prices and offering four floors of souvenir and gift items, including cotton yukata, kimono (new and used), woodblock prints, paper products, wind chimes, stationery, fans, chopsticks, lamps and vases, Imari chinaware, sake sets, Japanese dolls, pearls, and even books on Japan and a large selection of antique furniture. This store will also ship things home for you. Open Friday through Wednesday 10am to 7pm. There's a smaller branch on the fourth floor of Terminal 1 at Narita Airport (☎ 0476/32-9333), open daily from 7:30am to 8:30pm. 5–9–13 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3400-3933. Station:

Meiji-Jingumae (3 min.), Harajuku (4 min.), or Omotesando (5 min.). On Omotesando Dori in Harajuku; look for an Asian-looking facade of orange and green.

Sakai Kokodo Gallery This gallery claims to be the oldest woodblock print shop in Japan. The first shop was opened back in 1870 in the Kanda area of Tokyo by the present owner's great-grandfather, and altogether four generations of the Sakai family have tended the store. Open daily 11am to 6pm, it's a great place for original prints, as well as for reproductions of such great masters as Hiroshige. (If you're really a woodblock-print fan, you'll want to visit the Sakai family's excellent museum, Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, in the small town of Matsumoto in the Japan Alps; see p. 263.) 1-2-14 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku (across from the Imperial Hotel's Tower). ☎ 03/3591-4678. Station: Hibiya (1 min.).

DEPARTMENT STORES

Japanese department stores are institutions in themselves. Usually enormous, well-designed, and chock-full of merchandise, they have about everything you can imagine, including museums and art galleries, pet stores, rooftop playgrounds or greenhouses, travel agencies, restaurants, grocery markets, and flower shops. You could easily spend a whole day in a department store—eating, attending cultural exhibitions, planning your next vacation, having your neck massaged, and, well, shopping.

One of the most wonderful aspects of the Japanese department store is the **courteous service**. If you arrive at a store as its doors open at 10 or 10:30am, you'll witness a daily rite: Lined up at the entrance are staff who bow in welcome. Some Japanese shoppers arrive just before opening time so as not to miss this favorite ritual. Sales clerks are everywhere, ready to help you. In some stores, you don't even have to go to the cash register once you've made your choice; just hand over the product, along with your money, to the sales clerk, who will return with your change, your purchase neatly wrapped, and an "*Arigatoo* (the double oo is used to mean that you hold the "o" sound, not that it's a u sound) *gozaimashita*" (Thank you very much). A day spent in a Japanese department store could spoil you for the rest of your life.

The basement of the store is usually devoted to **foodstuffs**: fresh fish, produce, and prepared snacks and dinners. There are often free samples of food; if you're feeling slightly hungry, walking through the food department can do nicely for a snack. Many department stores include **boutiques** by such famous Japanese and international fashion designers as Issey Miyake, Rei Kawakubo (creator of Comme des Garçons), Hanae Mori, Takeo Kikuchi, Vivienne Westwood, and Paul Smith, as well as a department devoted to the kimono. Near the **kimono department** may also be the section devoted to **traditional crafts**; department stores are convenient places to shop for these. To find out what's where, stop by the store's information booth located on the ground floor near the front entrance and ask for the floor-by-floor pamphlet in English. Be sure, too, to ask about **sales** on the promotional floor—you never know what bargains you may chance upon.

Hours are generally from 10 or 10:30am to 7, 7:30, or 8pm. Department stores used to close 1 day a week, but now they close irregularly, always on the same day of the week (say, on Tues) but in no apparent pattern. One month they may be closed the second and third Tuesday of the month, but the next month only the first or not at all. In any case, you can always find several department stores that are open, even on Sundays and holidays (major shopping days in Japan). All major credit and charge cards are accepted.

Isetan Isetan is a favorite among foreigners living in Tokyo. It has a good line of conservative clothing appropriate for working situations, as well as contemporary and fashionable styles, including designer clothes (Issey Miyake, Yohji Yamamoto, Tsumori Chisato, Comme des Garçons, Marc Jacobs, and Sonia Rykiel) and large dress sizes (on the 2nd floor). It also has a great kimono section along with all the traditional accessories (obi, shoes, purses). In the annex, which carries mostly men's clothing, is also a New Creator's Space on the ground floor, unique among Japanese department stores (which are generally reluctant to carry anything but the tried and true), that showcases clothing by up-and-coming Japanese designers. Open daily 10am to 8pm; closed some Wednesdays. 3-14-1 Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku. ☎ 03/3352-1111. Station: Shinjuku Sanchoime (1 min.) or Shinjuku (east exit, 6 min.). On Shinjuku Dori, east of Shinjuku Station.

Matsuya This is one of my favorite department stores in Tokyo; if I were buying a wedding gift, Matsuya is one of the first places I'd look. It has a good selection of Japanese folkcraft items, kitchenware, kimono, and beautifully designed contemporary household goods in addition to the usual clothes and accessories. I also make a point of stopping by the seventh floor's Design Collection, which displays items from around the world selected by the Japan Design Committee as examples of fine design, from the Alessi teapot to Braun razors. Open daily 10am to 8pm. 3-6-1 Ginza, Chuo-ku. ☎ 03/3567-1211. Station: Ginza (2 min.). On Chuo Dori Ave., just a long block north of Ginza 4-chome Crossing.

Mitsukoshi This Nihombashi department store is one of Japan's oldest and grandest, founded in 1673 by the Mitsui family as a kimono store. In 1683, it became the first store in the world to deal only in cash sales; it was also one of the first stores in Japan to display goods on shelves rather than have merchants fetch bolts of cloth for each customer, as was the custom of the time. Yet another first: It was one of the first shops to employ female clerks. Today, housed in a building dating from 1914, it remains one of Tokyo's loveliest department stores, with a beautiful and stately Renaissance-style facade and an entrance guarded by two bronze lions, replicas of the lions in Trafalgar Square. For fortification, there's the Fortnum & Mason Tea Salon, Harrods Tea Salon, and Café Wien. The store carries many name-brand boutiques, including Givenchy, Dunhill, Chanel, Hanae Mori, Oscar de la Renta, Christian Dior, and Tiffany. Its kimono, by the way, are still hot items. Open daily 10am to 7:30pm; closed some Mondays.

Another branch, located right on Ginza 4-chome Crossing (☎ 03/3562-1111; Mon-Sat 10am-8pm, Sun 10am-7:30pm), is popular with young shoppers. 1-4-1 Nihombashi Muromachi, Chuo-ku. ☎ 03/3241-3311. Station: Mitsukoshimae (1 min.).

Seibu Once the nation's largest department store—and still one of the biggest—Seibu has 47 entrances, thousands of sales clerks, dozens of restaurants, 12 floors, 31 elevators, and an average of 170,000 shoppers a day. Two basement floors are devoted to foodstuffs—you can buy everything from taco shells to octopus to seaweed there. Dishes are set out so you can nibble the food as you move along, and hawkers yelling out their wares give the place a marketlike atmosphere. Fast-food counters sell salads, grilled eel, chicken, sushi, and other ready-to-eat dishes. The rest of the floors offer clothing, furniture, art galleries, kitchenware, and a million other things. Loft, Seibu's department for household goods and interior design, and Wave, Seibu's CD department, occupy the top four floors of the main building. Many of the best Japanese and Western designers have boutiques here; Size World and Queen's Coordination, both on the fourth floor, specialize in large and petite women's sizes respectively.

There's another Seibu in **Ginza** near the elevated tracks of the JR Yamanote Line, (☎ 03/3286-0111; daily 11am–8pm; closed some Tues; station: Yurakucho [between the Hibiya and Ginza subway stations], 1 min.). It specializes in men's and women's clothing and accessories, from casual to formal wear. Next to it is Hankyu, another large department store.

Also look for Seibu in **Shibuya** at 21–1 Udagawacho (☎ 03/3462-0111; open Sun–Wed 10am–8pm, Thurs–Sat 10am–9pm, closed some Wed; station: Shibuya, Hachiko exit, 2 min.), which is similar to the main store in Ikebukuro. This Seibu consists of two buildings connected by pedestrian skywalks, and it offers lots of designer boutiques; a branch of Loft (behind Seibu B), Seibu's interior design and household goods shop; and Parco and Movida fashion department stores. Open Monday through Saturday 10am to 9pm; Sunday and holidays 10am to 8pm. Closed some Tuesdays. 1–28–1 Minami Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku. ☎ 03/3981-0111. Station: Ikebukuro (underneath the store).

Takashimaya This department store provides stiff competition for Mitsukoshi, with a history just as long. It was founded as a kimono shop in Kyoto during the Edo Period and opened in Tokyo in 1933. Today it's one of the city's most attractive department stores, with white-gloved elevator operators whisking customers to eight floors of shopping and dining. Naturally, it features boutiques by such famous designers as Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Issey Miyake, and more. Open daily 10am to 7:30pm. Closed some Wednesdays. 2–4–1 Nihombashi (on Chuo Dori Ave.), Chuo-ku. ☎ 03/3211-4111. Station: Nihombashi (1 min.).

Takashimaya Times Square Since its opening in 1996, Takashimaya Times Square has been the number one draw in Shinjuku and is packed on weekends. Much larger than Takashimaya's Nihombashi flagship, this huge complex is anchored by Takashimaya department store, which boasts 10 floors of clothing and restaurants (petite and “queen-size” clothing are on the 6th floor). There's also Tokyu Hands with everything imaginable for the home hobbyist, and Kinokuniya bookstore with English-language books on the sixth floor. Open daily 10am to 8pm; closed some Wednesdays. 5–24–2 Sendagaya, Shinjuku-ku. ☎ 03/5361-1122. Station: Shinjuku (1 min.). Across the street from Shinjuku Station's south exit.

Tobu/Metropolitan Plaza Once overshadowed by nearby Seibu, this flagship of the Tobu chain expanded and reopened in 1993 as Japan's largest department store, employing 3,000 clerks to serve the 180,000 customers who enter its doors daily. It consists of a main building, a connecting central building, and Metropolitan Plaza. It offers everything from luxury goods and the latest international fashions to hardware, software, toys, daily necessities, and traditional Japanese products (good for souvenirs). Its basement food floor is massive—food accounts for nearly 20% of Tobu's total sales. Here, too, in its Metropolitan Plaza Building, is the home of the Japan Traditional Craft Center, a must for anyone interested in traditional and contemporary handmade Japanese crafts. Open daily 10am to 8pm; closed some Wednesdays. 1–1–25 Nishi-Ikebukuro, Toshima-ku. ☎ 03/3981-2211. Station: Ikebukuro (west exit, 1 min.).

Wako This is one of Ginza's smallest department stores but also one of its classiest, housed in one of the few area buildings that survived World War II. It was erected in 1932 and is famous for its distinctive clock tower, graceful curved facade, and innovative window displays. The owners are the Hattori family, founders of the Seiko watch company. The store's ground floor carries a wide selection of Seiko watches and clocks, while the upper floors carry imported and domestic fashions and luxury items with prices to match. It caters to older, well-to-do customers; you

won't find hordes of young Japanese girls shopping here. Hours are Monday to Saturday 10:30am to 6pm; closed holidays. 4-5-11 Ginza (at Ginza 4-chome Crossing), Chuo-ku. ☎ 03/3562-2111. Station: Ginza (1 min.).

ELECTRONICS

The largest concentration of electronics and electrical-appliance shops in Japan is in an area of Tokyo called **Akihabara Electric Town (Denkigai)**, centered around Chuo Dori. Although you can find good deals on video and audio equipment elsewhere (especially just west of Shinjuku Station, where Yodobashi—see “Cameras,” below—dominates with several stores devoted to electronics), Akihabara is special simply for its sheer volume. With more than 600 multilevel stores, shops, and stalls, Akihabara accounts for one-tenth of the nation's electronics and electrical-appliance sales. An estimated 50,000 shoppers come here on a weekday, 100,000 per day on a weekend. Even if you don't buy anything, it's great fun walking around. If you do intend to buy, make sure you know what the item would cost back home. Or, you may be able to pick up something that's unavailable back home. Most of the stores and stalls are open-fronted, and many are painted neon green and pink. Inside, lights flash, fans blow, washing machines shake and shimmy, and stereos blast. Salesmen yell out their wares, trying to get customers to look at their rice cookers, refrigerators, computers, cellphones, video equipment, digital cameras, CD and DVD players, TVs, calculators, and watches. This is the best place to go to see the latest models of everything electronic, an educational experience in itself.

If you are buying, be sure to bargain and don't buy at the first place you go to. One woman I know who was looking for a portable music device bought it at the third shop she went to for ¥4,000 (\$33) less than what was quoted to her at the first shop. Make sure, too, that whatever you purchase is made for export—that is, with instructions in English, an international warranty, and the proper electrical connectors. All the larger stores have duty-free floors where products are made for export. Two of the largest are **Yamagiwa**, 3-13-10 Soto-Kanda (☎ 03/3253-2111); and **Laox**, 15-3 Soto-Kanda (☎ 03/3255-5301). If you're serious about buying, check these stores first, and make sure you have your passport with you, in case you need to show it (though as a foreigner, I have never been asked for it).

The easiest way to get to Akihabara is via the Yamanote Line or Sobu Line to the JR Akihabara Station. You can also take the Hibiya subway line to Akihabara Station, but it's farther to walk. In any case, take the Akihabara Electric Town exit. Most shops are open daily from about 10:30am to 7 or 8pm.

Cameras

You can purchase cameras at many duty-free shops, including those in Akihabara, but if you're really serious about photographic equipment or want to stock up on film, make a trip to a shop dealing specifically in cameras. If purchasing a new camera is too formidable an expense, consider buying a used camera. New models come out so frequently in Japan that older models can be grabbed for next to nothing.

Bic Camera This huge, eight-floor store near the Ginza offers not only single-lens reflex, large and medium format, and digital cameras but also computers, DVD players, video cameras, watches, toys, and much more. Note, however, that it caters primarily to Japanese; English-speaking sales clerks are scarce and export models are limited. Ask for the English brochure. Open daily 10am to 8pm.

There's also a branch in Shibuya at 1-24-12 Shibuya (☎ 03/5466-1111; daily 10am-8pm; station: Shibuya, 2 min.). 1-11-1 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku. ☎ 03/5221-1112. Station: Yurakucho (1 min.).

③⑧ **Lemon** Its name doesn't inspire confidence, but this company specializes in used and new cameras from around the world, mostly Nikon but also Olympus, Leica, Canon, Pentax, Hasselblad, Rollei, and others. It's a camera buff's paradise. Open Monday to Saturday 11am to 8pm. 4-3-14 Ginza, Chuo-ku. ☎ 03/3567-4582 for the ground floor of mostly-used Japanese models, ☎ 03/3567-3131 for the 8th floor of new and used mostly foreign models. Station: Ginza (1 min.).

Yodobashi Camera Shinjuku is the photographic equipment center for Tokyo, and this store, 1 block west of the station, is the biggest in the area. In fact, it ranks as one of the largest discount camera shops in the world, with around 30,000 items in stock, and it reputedly sells approximately 500 to 600 cameras daily. Although prices are marked, you can bargain here. This is the place to stock up on film; you can also have film developed here. In addition to cameras, it sells watches, calculators, computers, and other electronic equipment, though if you're interested specifically in watches, clocks, audio/video equipment, games, and other wares, there are branches nearby that specialize in all of these (ask at the main shop for a map of the area). Open daily 9:30am to 9pm. 1-11-1 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku. ☎ 03/3346-1010. Station: Shinjuku (west exit, 3 min.).

FASHIONS

The **department stores** and **shopping malls** listed earlier are all good places to check out the latest trends. For inexpensive, basic clothing (think the Japanese version of Gap), look for one of the 40 **Uniqlo** shops in Tokyo selling T-shirts, jeans, socks, shirts, and other clothing for the whole family. Two convenient locations are 6-10-8 Jingumae (☎ 03/5468-7313; station: Meiji-Jingumae, on Meiji Dori in the direction of Shibuya); and 16-17 Udagawacho (☎ 03/5728-8431; station: Shibuya).

Otherwise, Harajuku and Shibuya are the places to go for hundreds of small shops selling inexpensive designer knockoffs, as well as for fashion department stores—multistoried buildings filled with concessions of various designers and labels. The stores below are two of the most well known and the largest.

La Forêt This is not only the largest store in Harajuku but also one of the most fashionable, appealing mostly to teenage and 20-something shoppers. Young and upcoming Japanese designers are here as well as established names. You'll find the most reasonably priced fashions and accessories in the basement and on the fourth floor. There's also an annex. There's so much to see, you could easily spend a few hours here. Open daily 11am to 8pm. 1-11-6 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3475-0411. Station: Meiji-Jingumae (1 min.) or Harajuku (3 min.). Just off Harajuku's main intersection of Omotesando Dori and Meiji Dori.

Parco A division of Seibu (see above), Parco is actually three buildings clustered together and called Parco Part 1, Part 2, and Part 3. Parco Part 1 is the place to go for designer boutiques for men and women, with clothes by Japanese designers like Yohji Yamamoto and Tsumori Chisato. Part 2 has children's clothing, while Part 3 is devoted to sports clothes and casual clothing. Parco has two sales a year that you shouldn't miss if you're here—one in January and one in July. Hours are daily 10am to 8:30pm. 15-1 Udagawacho, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3464-5111. Station: Shibuya (Hachiko exit, 4 min.).

Designer Boutiques

The block between Omotesando Crossing and the Nezu Museum in **Aoyama** (station: Omotesando, 2 min.) has become the Rodeo Drive of Japan, the showcase of top designers. Even if you can't buy anything here (steep prices for most pocketbooks), a stroll is *de rigueur* for clothes hounds and those interested in design. Most shops are open daily from 11am to 8pm. **Comme des Garçons**, on the right side as you walk from Aoyama Dori (☎ 03/3406-3951), is Rei Kawakubo's showcase for her daring—and constantly evolving—men's and women's designs. The goddess of Japanese fashion and one of the few females in the business, Kawakubo has remained on the cutting edge of design for almost 2 decades. Across the street is **Issey Miyake** (☎ 03/3423-1408), with two floors of cool, spacious displays of Miyake's interestingly structured designs for men and women. (His very popular Pleats Please line is around the corner on Aoyama Dori, 3-13-21 Minami Aoyama; ☎ 03/5772-7750.) One of Japan's newer designers, **Tsumori Chisato**, has a shop on the left side of the street (☎ 03/3423-5170). Also worth seeking out along this stretch is **Yohji Yamamoto** on the right side of the street (☎ 03/3409-6006), where Yamamoto's unique, classically wearable clothes are sparingly hung, flaunting the avant-garde interior space.

FLEA MARKETS

Flea markets are good opportunities to shop for antiques as well as delightful junk. You can pick up secondhand kimono at very reasonable prices, as well as kitchenware, vases, cast-iron teapots, small chests, dolls, household items, and odds and ends. (Don't expect to find any good buys in furniture.) The markets usually begin as early as dawn or 6am and last until 3 or 4pm or so, but go early if you want to pick up bargains. Bargaining is expected. Note that, since most are outdoors, they tend to be canceled if it rains. Tokyo also has huge antiques fairs several times a year, including the Heiwajima Antique Fair, held for several days in May, June, July, September, and December near Ryutsu Center Station on the Tokyo Monorail Line; and an antiques fair held at Ueno Shinobazu Pond for several weeks in April, July, August, and October. Contact the Tourist Information Center for an update.

Togo Shrine, on Meiji Dori in Harajuku (near Meiji-Jingumae or Harajuku stations), has an antiques market on the first, fourth and, when there is one, fifth Sunday of every month from 4am to 2pm. Great for used kimono as well as small furniture and curios, it's one of my favorites. **Nogi Shrine**, a 1-minute walk from Nogizaka Station, has an antiques flea market from dawn to about 2pm the second Sunday of each month except November.

Hanazono Shrine, near the Yasukuni Dori/Meiji Dori intersection east of Shinjuku Station (a 5-min. walk from Shinjuku Sancho Station), has a flea market every Sunday from dawn to about 2pm (except in May and Nov due to festivals).

Finally, the closest thing Tokyo has to a permanent flea market is **Ameya Yokocho** (also referred to as Ameyokocho or Ameyacho), a narrow street near Ueno Park that runs along and underneath the elevated tracks of the JR Yamanote Line between Ueno and Okachimachi stations. There are about 400 stalls here selling discounted items ranging from fish, seaweed, and vegetables to handbags, tennis shoes, cosmetics, watches, and casual clothes. The scene retains something of the *shitamachi* spirit of old Tokyo. Although housewives have been coming here for years, young Japanese recently discovered the market as a good bargain spot for fashions, accessories, and cosmetics. Some shops close on

Wednesdays, but hours are usually daily from 10am to 7pm; early evening is the most crowded time. Don't even think of coming here on a holiday—it's a standstill pedestrian traffic jam.

KIMONO

Chicago, on Omotesando Dori in Harajuku (☎ 03/3409-5017; station: Meiji-Jingumae, 1 min., or Harajuku, 2 min.), is the place to go for used kimono. It stocks hundreds of affordable used kimono, cotton yukata, and obi (sashes) towards the back left corner of the basement shop, past the 1950s clothes, in its Kimono Corner. Open daily from 11am to 8pm. The nearby **Oriental Bazaar** (p. 204) also has a decent selection of new and used kimono at affordable prices, including elaborate wedding kimono. **Antique Mall Ginza** (p. 202) has an entire floor devoted to used kimono and traditional clothing.

In addition, department stores sell new kimono, notably **Takashimaya** and **Mitsukoshi** in Nihombashi and **Isetan** in Shinjuku. They also hold sales for rental wedding kimono. Flea markets are also good for used kimono and yukata, particularly the antiques market at **Togo Shrine**.

Established in 1913, **Hayashi Kimono** (☎ 03/3501-4012), with two locations in the International Arcade (p. 203), sells all manner of kimono, including antique kimono, cotton yukata, and *tanzen* (the heavy winter overcoat that goes over the yukata). If you're buying a gift for someone back home, this is the best place to start. Open daily from 10am to 7pm (to 6pm on Sun).

KITCHENWARE & TABLEWARE

In addition to the department stores listed above, the best place to shop for items related to cooking and serving is **Kappabashi-dougugai Dori** (station: Tawaramachi), popularly known as Kappabashi; this is Japan's largest wholesale area for cookware. There are approximately 150 specialty stores here selling cookware, including sukiyaki pots, woks, lunch boxes, pots and pans, aprons, knives, china, lacquerware, rice cookers, and disposable wooden chopsticks in bulk. Although stores are wholesalers selling mainly to restaurants, you're welcome to browse and purchase as well. Stores are closed on Sunday but are otherwise open from about 10am to 5pm.

PEARLS

Mikimoto, on Chuo Dori not far from Ginza 4-chome Crossing, past Wako department store (☎ 03/3535-54611; station: Ginza, 1 min.), is Japan's most famous pearl shop. It was founded by Mikimoto Koichi, the first to produce a really good cultured pearl, in 1905. Open daily 11am to 7:30pm; closed occasionally on Wednesday. Otherwise, there's a Mikimoto branch (☎ 03/3591-5001) in the **Imperial Hotel Arcade**, under the Imperial Hotel (station: Hibiya), where you'll also find **Asahi Shoten** (☎ 03/3503-2528), with a good selection in the modest-to-moderate price range; and **K. Uyeda Pearl Shop** (☎ 03/3503-2587), with a wide selection of pearls in many different price ranges.

10 Tokyo After Dark

By day, Tokyo is arguably one of the least attractive cities in the world. Come dusk, however, Tokyo comes into its own. The drabness fades, the city blossoms into a profusion of giant neon lights and paper lanterns, and its streets fill with millions of overworked Japanese out to have a good time. If you ask me, Tokyo at night is one of the craziest cities in the world, a city that never gives up and

never seems to sleep. Entertainment districts are as crowded at 3am as they are at 10pm, with many establishments open until the first subways start running after 5am. Whether it's jazz, reggae, gay bars, sex shows, dance clubs, mania, or madness that you're searching for, Tokyo has it all.

GETTING TO KNOW THE SCENE Tokyo has several nightlife districts spread throughout the city, each with its own atmosphere, price range, and clientele. Most famous are probably **Kabuki-cho** in Shinjuku, and **Roppongi**. Before visiting any of the locales suggested below, be sure to just walk around one of these neighborhoods and absorb the atmosphere. The streets will be crowded, the neon lights will be overwhelming, and you never know what you might discover on your own.

Although there are many bars, discos, and clubs packed with young Japanese of both sexes, nightlife in Japan for the older generations is still pretty much a man's domain, just as it has been for centuries. At the high end of this domain are the **geisha bars**, concentrated primarily in Kyoto. All Japanese cities, however, have so-called **hostess bars**; in Tokyo these are concentrated in Ginza, Roppongi, Shinjuku, and Akasaka. A woman will sit at your table, talk to you, pour your drinks, listen to your problems, and boost your ego. You buy her drinks as well, which is one reason the tab can be so high. Hostess bars in various forms have been a part of Japanese society for centuries. Most of you will probably find the cost of visiting a hostess bar not worth the price since hostesses usually speak only Japanese, but such places provide Japanese males with sympathetic ears and the chance to escape the world of both work and family. Men usually have their favorite hostess bar, often a small place with just enough room for regular customers. In the more exclusive hostess bars, only those customers with an introduction are allowed entrance.

The most popular nightlife spots are **drinking establishments**, where the vast majority of Japan's office workers, college students, and ex-patriates go for an evening out. These places include Western-style bars as well as Japanese-style watering holes, called *nomi-ya*. Yakitori-ya, restaurant-bars that serve yakitori and other snacks, are included in this group. Dancing and live-music venues are also hugely popular with young Tokyoites.

At the low end of the spectrum are Tokyo's topless bars, sex shows, massage parlors, and porn shops, with the largest concentration of such places in Shinjuku's **Kabuki-cho District**.

In addition to the establishments listed below, be sure to check the restaurants listed in the inexpensive category under "Where to Dine," in chapter 3 for a relatively cheap night out on the town. Many places serve as both eateries and watering holes, especially yakitori-ya.

EXTRA CHARGES & TAXES One more thing you should be aware of is the "table charge" that some bars and many cocktail lounges charge their customers. Included in the table charge is usually a small appetizer—maybe nuts, chips, or a vegetable. For this reason, some places call it an *otsumami*, or a snack charge. At any rate, the charge is usually between ¥300 and ¥500 (\$2.70–\$4.50) per person. Some establishments levy a table charge only after a certain time in the evening; others may add it only if you don't order food from the menu. If you're not sure and it matters to you, be sure to ask before ordering anything. Remember, too, that a 5% consumption tax will be added to your bill. Some higher-end establishments, especially nightclubs, hostess bars, and some dance clubs, will also add a 10% to 20% service charge.

FINDING OUT WHAT'S ON To find out what's happening in the entertainment scene—contemporary and traditional music and theater, films, and special events—keep an eye out for the free weekly *Metropolis*, which carries a nightlife section covering concerts and events and is available at bars, restaurants, and other venues around town. The *Japan Times* and *Daily Yomiuri* also carry entertainment sections.

GETTING TICKETS FOR EVENTS If you're staying in one of the higher-class hotels, the concierge or guest-relations manager can usually get tickets for you. Otherwise, you can always head to the theater or hall itself. An easier way is to go through one of many ticket services available. **Ticket PIA** (☎ 03/5237-9999) is probably your best bet because it has an English-language service. Another good service is provided by **CN Playguide** (☎ 03/5802-9999).

THE PERFORMING ARTS

For descriptions of Japanese traditional performance arts such as Kabuki and Noh, see “Cultural Snapshots: Japanese Arts in a Nutshell,” in appendix A. In addition to the performance art listings below, Tokyo also has occasional shows of more avant-garde or lesser-known performance art productions, including highly stylized Butoh dance performances from companies like Sankai Juku and percussion demonstrations by Kodo drummers and other Japanese drum groups. See one of the publications listed above for complete listings.

KABUKI Of the several theaters in Tokyo with regular showings of Kabuki, none is more well known or prestigious than **Kabukiza** ★★, 4–12–15 Ginza (☎ 03/5565-6000 for advance reservations; www.shochiku.co.jp/play/kabukiza/theater/index.html). Conveniently located within easy walking distance of the Ginza 4-chome Crossing (directly above the Higashi-Ginza Station), this impressive theater with a Momoyama-style facade (influenced by 16th-century castle architecture) is a remake of the 1924 original building. It seats almost 2,000 and features the usual Kabuki stage fittings, including a platform that can be raised and lowered below the stage for dramatic appearances and disappearances of actors, a revolving stage, and a runway stage extending into the audience.

The Kabukiza stages about eight or nine Kabuki productions a year. Each production begins its run between the first and third of each month and runs about 25 days, with performances daily from 11 or 11:30am to about 9pm (there are no shows in Aug). Usually, two different programs are shown; matinees run from about 11 or 11:30am to 4pm, and evening performances run from about 4:30 or 5pm to about 9pm. It's considered perfectly okay to come for only part of a performance.

Of course, you won't be able to understand what's being said, but that doesn't matter; the productions themselves are great entertainment. For an outline of the plot, you can purchase an **English program**, which costs ¥1,000 (\$8.35); you also can rent **English earphones** for ¥650 (\$5.40), plus a ¥1,000 (\$8.35) refundable deposit—these provide a running commentary on the story, music, actors, stage properties, and other aspects of Kabuki. Buying a program or renting earphones will add immensely to your enjoyment of the play.

Tickets generally range from ¥2,500 to ¥16,800 (\$21–\$140), depending on the program and seat location. Advance tickets can be purchased at the **Advance Ticket Office** to the right side of Kabukiza's main entrance from 10am to 6pm. You may also make advance reservations by phone (same-day bookings are not accepted). Otherwise, tickets for each day's performance are placed on sale 1 hour before the start of each performance.

If you don't have time for an entire performance or you wish to view Kabuki only for a short while, it's possible to watch only one act, with tickets costing only ¥600 to ¥1,000 (\$5–\$8.35), depending on the time of day and length of the show. One-acts generally last about 1 or 1½ hours; note that English-language earphones are not available here, but you can buy a program. Note also that seats are a bit far from the stage, on the very top two rows of the theater (on the 4th floor; there is no elevator). On the other hand, I have seen several acts this way, sometimes by simply dropping by when I'm in the area; it's a marvelous mid-day break from the rigors of shopping. Tickets, sold at the smaller entrance to the left of the main entrance, are available on a first-come, first-served basis and go on sale 20 minutes prior to each act. If you liked the act so much that you wish to remain for the next one, it's possible to do so if the act is not sold out; tickets in these cases are usually available on the fourth floor.

If you're in Tokyo in August, you can usually see Kabuki at the **National Theater of Japan (Kokuritsu Gekijo)**, 4–1 Hayabusacho, Chiyoda-ku (☎ 03/3265-7411; station: Hanzomon, 6 min.). Kabuki is scheduled here throughout the year except during May, September, and December, when Bunraku (see below) is staged instead. Matinees usually begin at noon, and evening performances begin at 5pm. Most tickets range from about ¥1,500 to ¥3,800 (\$13–\$32).

NOH Noh performances are given at many locations in Tokyo, with tickets ranging from about ¥2,300 to ¥6,000 (\$19–\$50). Performances are usually in the early afternoon at 1pm or in the late afternoon at 5 or 6:30pm; check the *Japan Times* or *Daily Yomiuri* for exact times. The **National Noh Theater (Kokuritsu Nohgakudo)**, 4–18–1 Sendagaya, Shibuya-ku (☎ 03/3423-1331; station: Sendagaya, 5 min.), is Tokyo's most famous. Other Noh theaters worth checking out are **Hosho Nohgakudo**, 1–5–9 Hongo, Bunkyo-ku (☎ 03/3811-4843; station: Suidobashi, 5 min.); **Kanze Nohgakudo**, 1–16–4 Shoto, Shibuya-ku (☎ 03/3469-5241; station: Shibuya, 10 min.); **Kita Nohgakudo**, 4–6–9 Kami-Osaki, Shinagawa-ku (☎ 03/3491-8813; station: JR Meguro, 10 min.); and **Tessenkai Nohgaku-do Kenshujo**, 4–21–29 Minami Aoyama, Minato-ku (☎ 03/3401-2285; station: Omotesando, exit A4, 5 min.).

BUNRAKU Three Bunraku performances a year—in May, September, and December—are staged at The National Theater of Japan (Kokuritsu Gekijo), 4–1 Hayabusacho, Chiyoda-ku (☎ 03/3230-3000; station: Hanzomon, 6 min.). There are usually two to three performances daily at 11am, 2:30pm, and 6pm, with tickets averaging ¥5,000 to ¥6,000 (\$42–\$50). Earphones with English explanations are available for ¥650 (\$5.40).

TAKARAZUKA KAGEKIDAN This world-famous, all-female troupe stages elaborate musical revues with dancing, singing, and gorgeous costumes, with performances ranging from Japanese versions of Broadway hits to original Japanese works based on local legends. The first Takarazuka troupe, formed in 1912 at a resort near Osaka, gained instant notoriety because all its performers were women, in contrast to the all-male Kabuki. When I went to see this troupe perform, I was surprised to find that the audience also consisted almost exclusively of women; indeed, the troupe has an almost cult-like following.

Performances, with story synopses available in English, are held generally in March, April, July, August, November, December, and sometimes in June at **Tokyo Takarazuka Gekijo**, 1–1–3 Yurakucho (☎ 03/5251-2001; station: Hibiya, 1 min.). Tickets, available at the box office or through Ticket Pia (☎ 03/5237-9999), generally range from about ¥3,500 to ¥10,000 (\$29–\$83).

KINGYO ♠ This sophisticated nightclub stages one of the most high-energy, visually charged acts I've ever seen—nonstop action of ascending and receding stages and stairs, fast-paced choreography, elaborate costumes, and loud music. There are a few female dancers, but most of the dancers are males assuming female parts, just like in Kabuki. In fact, many of the performances center on traditional Japanese themes with traditional dress and kimono, but the shows take place in a very technically sophisticated setting. There are also satires: One past performance included a piece on Microsoft vs. Apple; another featured aliens from outer space—great fun. It's located in the heart of the Roppongi nightlife district at 3-14-17 Roppongi (☎ 03/3478-3000; station: Roppongi, 4 min.), near the Roppongi cemetery (from Roppongi Crossing, walk toward Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori and turn left at Freshness Burger). Cover is ¥4,000 (\$33) for daily shows at 7:30 and 10pm, with additional shows Friday and Saturday at 1:20am for only ¥2,000 (\$17). Reservations are advised, as this is a very popular show.

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

THE MAJOR ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS

GINZA A chic and expensive shopping area by day, Ginza transforms itself into a dazzling entertainment district of restaurants, bars, and first-grade hostess bars at night. It's the most sophisticated of Tokyo's nightlife districts and is also one of the most expensive. Almost all the Japanese businessmen you see out carousing in Ginza are paying by expense account; the prices are ridiculously high.

Since I'm not wealthy, I prefer Shinjuku and Roppongi. However, because Ginza does have some fabulous restaurants and several hotels, I've included some reasonably priced recommendations for a drink in the area if you happen to find yourself here after dinner. The cheapest way to absorb the atmosphere in Ginza is simply to wander about, particularly around **Namiki Dori** and its side streets.

SHINJUKU Northeast of Shinjuku Station is an area called **Kabuki-cho**, which undoubtedly has the craziest nightlife in all of Tokyo, with block after block of strip joints, massage parlors, pornography shops, peep shows, bars, restaurants, and, as the night wears on, lots of drunk revelers. A world of its own, it's sleazy, chaotic, crowded, vibrant, and fairly safe. Despite its name, Shinjuku's primary night hot spot has nothing to do with Kabuki. At one time, there was a plan to bring some culture to the area by introducing a Kabuki theater; the plan never materialized but the name stuck. Although Kabuki-cho used to be the domain of businessmen out on the town, in recent years young Japanese, including college-age men and women, have claimed parts of it as their own and now outnumber businessmen; the result is that there are a growing number of inexpensive drinking establishments well worth a visit.

To the east of Kabuki-cho is a smaller district called **Goruden Gai**, which is "Golden Guy" mispronounced. It's a neighborhood of tiny alleyways leading past even tinier bars, each consisting of just a counter and a few chairs. Generally closed to outsiders, these closet-size bars cater to regular customers. On hot summer evenings, the mama-san of these bars sit outside on stools and fan themselves, with soft red lights melting out of the open doorways. Things aren't as they appear, however. These aren't brothels—they're simply bars, and the "mama"-san are as likely to be men as women. Although many thought Goruden Gai would succumb to land-hungry developers in the 1980s, the economic recession has brought it a stay of execution. In fact, in recent years, Goruden Gai has experienced a revival, with approximately 200 tiny drinking dens lining the

tiny streets. Still, it occupies such expensive land that I still fear for the life of this tiny enclave, one of Tokyo's most fascinating.

Even farther east is **Shinjuku 2-chome** (pronounced "knee-chomay"), officially recognized as the gay-bar district of Shinjuku. Its lively street scene of mostly gays and some straights of all ages (but mostly young) make this one of the most vibrant nightlife districts. It's here that I was once taken to a host bar featuring young men in crotchless pants. The clientele included both gay men and groups of young, giggling office girls. That place has since closed down, but Shinjuku is riddled with other spots bordering on the absurd.

The best thing to do in Shinjuku is to simply walk about. In the glow of neon light, you'll pass everything from smoke-filled restaurants to hawkers trying to get you to step inside so they can part you from your money. If you're looking for strip joints, topless or bottomless coffee shops, peep shows, or porn, I leave you to your own devices, but you certainly won't have any problems finding them. In Kabukicho alone, there are an estimated 200 sex businesses in operation, including bath-houses where women are available for sex, usually at a cost of around ¥30,000 (\$250). Although prostitution is illegal in Japan, everyone seems to ignore what goes on behind closed doors. Just be sure you know what you are getting into; your bill at the end may add up to much more than you figured.

ROPPONGI To Tokyo's younger crowd, Roppongi is the city's most fashionable place to hang out. It's also a favorite with the foreign community, including models, business types, and English teachers. Roppongi has more than its fair share of live-music houses, restaurants, discos, ex-patriate bars, and pubs. Some Tokyoites complain that Roppongi is too crowded, too crass, and too commercialized (and has too many foreigners), but for the casual visitor, I think Roppongi offers an excellent opportunity to see what's new and hot in the capital city, and it's easy to navigate because nightlife activity is so concentrated.

The center of Roppongi is **Roppongi Crossing** (the intersection of Roppongi Dori and Gaien-Higashi Dori), at the corner of which sits the garishly pink Almond Coffee Shop. The shop itself has mediocre coffee and desserts at terribly inflated prices, but the sidewalk in front of the store is the number one meeting spot in Roppongi.

If you need directions, there's a conveniently located **koban** (police box) catty-corner from the Almond Coffee Shop and next to the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi. It has a big map of the Roppongi area showing the address system, and someone is always there.

If the buzz of Roppongi is too much, try neighboring **Nishi-Azabu**, which has several restaurants and bars catering to both Japanese and foreigners. The center of Nishi-Azabu is the next big crossroads, Nishi-Azabu Crossing (the intersection of Roppongi Dori and Gaien-Nishi Dori). Nishi Azabu is about a 10-minute walk from Roppongi Station, past Roppongi Hills in the direction of Shibuya.

LIVE MUSIC

The live-music scene exploded in the 1990s and is now located throughout the metropolis. In addition to the dedicated venues below, several bars offer live music most nights of the week, including What the Dickens (see "The Bar Scene," below).

Bauhaus This small club has a great house band that plays mostly 1970s and 1980s British and American hard rock (Deep Purple, ZZ Top, Aerosmith, Queen, the Rolling Stones, Led Zeppelin), with five sets beginning at 8pm. The

Tips Mapping Out Tokyo's Nightlife

Once you've chosen a nightlife spot that appeals to you, you can locate it using the following neighborhood maps:

- To locate bars and clubs in **Akasaka**, p. 119.
- To locate bars and clubs in **Shinjuku**, p. 128.
- To locate bars and clubs in **Asakusa**, p. 133.
- To locate bars and clubs in **Hibiya** and **Ginza**, p. 144.
- To locate bars and clubs in **Harajuku**, p. 159.
- To locate bars and clubs in **Roppongi**, p. 165.

band puts on quite a show—a bit raunchy at times. Hours are Monday to Saturday 7pm to 1am. Reine Roppongi, 2nd floor, 5–3–4 Roppongi. ☎ **03/3403-0092**. Cover ¥2,700 (\$23). Station: Roppongi (3 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk toward Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori and turn right at McDonald's.

Birdland Down to earth and featuring good jazz (with an emphasis on '40s swing) performed by Japanese musicians, Birdland has been a welcome refuge from Roppongi's madding crowd for more than a quarter of a century. It's small and cozy with candles and soft lighting and attracts an older, knowledgeable, and appreciative crowd. Incidentally, the official cover price is ¥3,500 (\$29), but management told me if you show your *Frommer's* guide, you can get in for ¥1,500 (\$13). Hours are Monday through Saturday from 6pm to midnight (music begins at 7pm). Square Bldg. (in the basement), 3–10–3 Roppongi. ☎ **03/3478-3456**. Cover ¥1,500 (\$13) plus ¥900 (\$7.50) drink minimum and 15% service charge. Station: Roppongi (2 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk toward Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori and take the 1st left.

Blue Note Tokyo's most expensive, elegant jazz venue is cousin to the famous Blue Note in New York and has proven so popular it outgrew its original 1988 location and moved into this larger location 10 years later. Still, with 300 seats, it follows the frustrating practice of selling tickets good for only one set (there are two sets nightly). The musicians are top-notch; Oscar Peterson, Sarah Vaughan, Tony Bennett, David Sanborn, and the Milt Jackson Quartet have all performed here. Hours are Monday through Saturday from 5:30pm to 1am, with shows at 7 and 9:30pm. 6–3–16 Minami Aoyama. ☎ **03/5485-0088**. Cover ¥7,000 – ¥8,000 (\$58–\$67) for most performances, more for top names. Station: Omotesando (8 min.). Off Kotto Dori.

Body & Soul This low-ceilinged, tiny but cozy basement club with only a few tables and a long bar gives everyone a good view of its mostly jazz performances by Japanese and foreign musicians. Hours are Monday through Saturday from 7pm to midnight. 6–13–9 Minami Aoyama. ☎ **03/5466-3348**. Cover ¥3,500 (\$29) and up. Station: Omotesando (7 min.). Off Kotto Dori, near Nobu.

Cavern Club If you know your Beatles history, you'll know Cavern is the name of the Liverpool club where the Fab Four got their start. The Tokyo club features Beatles memorabilia and house bands performing Beatles music exclusively—and very convincingly at that. Close your eyes, and you'll swear you're listening to the real thing. Extremely popular with both Japanese and foreigners, it's packed on weekends—expect long lines. Reservations are taken but are good for only two sets—then you have to leave. Hours are Monday through Saturday 6pm to 2:30am; Sunday and holidays 6pm to midnight. 5–3–2 Roppongi. ☎ **03/3405-5207**.

Cover ¥1,500 (\$13), plus a 1-drink minimum and 10% service charge. Station: Roppongi (4 min.). Take the side street going downhill on the left side of Almond Coffee Shop and then take the 1st left; the club will be on the right.

Crocodile Popular with a young Japanese crowd, the eclectic Crocodile describes itself as a casual rock 'n' roll club, with live bands ranging from rock and blues to jazz-fusion, reggae, soul, experimental, and even country and salsa. It's a good place to check out new Japanese bands. It has an interesting interior and a good, laid-back atmosphere; depending on the music, the clientele ranges from Japanese with bleached-blond hair and earrings to a grunge and even middle-aged crowd. Open daily from 6pm to 2am; music starts at 8pm. 6-18-8 Jingumae, on Meiji Dori between Harajuku and Shibuya. ☎ 03/3499-5205. Cover ¥2,000 – ¥3,000 (\$17–\$25), occasionally more for big acts. Station: Meiji-Jingumae or Shibuya (8 min.).

Liquid Room This is one of Tokyo's longest-running live venues, home to some of the hottest Japanese and international bands; DJs hold court when there's no live music. As seating is very limited, most people come to keep moving, making this a good place to join the dancing crowd grooving to Tokyo's best sound system. Open most (but not all) nights from about 6pm. Humax Pavilion, 7th floor, 120-1 Kabuki-cho. ☎ 03/3200-6831. Cover ¥3,000 – ¥5,000 (\$25–\$42) for most acts. Station: Shinjuku (east exit, 10 min.). Across from Koma Stadium's northwest side.

Music Pub Gabi Gabi Harajuku's only bar with free live music every night of the week, this smoky, scruffy-looking bar is a good place to check out up-and-coming Japanese acts, including blues, jazz, rock, and pop, but you'll have to stay out past 10pm to hear them. Daily noon to 5am, with live music from 10pm. 6-5-6 Jingumae, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3499-3145. Station: Meiji-Jingumae (1 min.) or Harajuku (3 min.). A stone's throw from the Meiji/Omotesando intersection, on Meiji Dori catty-corner from Condomania.

New York Bar This is one of Tokyo's most sophisticated venues, boasting Manhattan-style jazz and breathtaking views of glittering west Shinjuku. Unfortunately, it's also one of the city's smallest. Consider coming for dinner in the adjacent **New York Grill** (p. 155); you'll save the cost of the cover. Daily from 5pm, with live music 8pm to midnight. Park Hyatt Hotel, 52nd floor, 3-7-1-2 Nishi-Shinjuku. ☎ 03/5322-1234. Cover ¥2,000 (\$17). Station: Shinjuku (13 min.), Hatsudai on the Keio Line (7 min.), or Tochomae (8 min.).

Roppongi Pit Inn Another well-known music house, this no-frills joint has been catering to a younger crowd of jazz enthusiasts for 25 years. It boasts some of the finest in native and imported jazz, as well as fusion and jazz rock. Daily from 6:30pm, with shows at about 7:30pm. 3-17-7 Roppongi (in the basement). ☎ 03/3585-1063. Cover ¥3,000 – ¥4,000 (\$25–\$33), including 1 drink. Station: Roppongi (7 min.).

Ruby Room I've seen living rooms larger than this second-floor venue, home to local acts, open mic on Tuesdays, house and techno DJs, and other events. The crowd depends on the music, but since there's no room to move, people just dance where they are, and the band is close, close, close—any closer and you'd be in the drummer's lap. Daily 7pm to 5am. 2-25-17 Dogenzaka, Shibuya-ku. ☎ 03/3780-3022. Cover ¥1,000 (\$8.35) Fri–Sat only, including 1 drink. Station: Shibuya (2 min.). Take the Hachiko exit to Dogenzaka and turn right at Mos.

Shinjuku Pit Inn This is one of Tokyo's most famous and longest-running jazz, fusion, and blues clubs, featuring both Japanese and foreign musicians. There are two programs daily—at 2:30 and 7:30pm—making it a great place to stop for a bit of music in the middle of the day. Since only a few snacks (such as

potato chips and sandwiches) are available, eat before you come. 2–12–4 Shinjuku, southeast of the Yasukuni Dori/Meiji Dori intersection. ☎ 03/3354-2024. Cover from ¥1,300 (\$11), including 1 drink, for the 2:30pm show (¥2,500/\$21 weekends and holidays), ¥3,000–¥4,000 (\$25–\$33), including 1 drink, for the evening show. Station: Shinjuku Sanchoe (4 min.).

DANCE CLUBS & DISCOS

Discos lost popularity after their 1980s heyday, but with the rise of almost cult-figure DJs, dance clubs have witnessed a resurgence in recent years, with Roppongi still boasting more dance clubs than anywhere else in the city. Sometimes the set cover charge includes drinks and occasionally even food, which makes for an inexpensive way to spend an evening. Keep in mind, however, that prices are usually higher on weekends and are sometimes higher for men than for women. Although discos are required by law to close at midnight, many of them ignore the rule and stay open until dawn.

Code Known for its frequent trance and techno events, Kabuki-cho's largest club brings in both Japanese and foreign DJs to keep things hopping on its massive dance floor. Once a month (look for Code's leaflets distributed around town), it's for men only. Daily 8pm to midnight. Shinjuku Toho-Kaikan, 4th floor, 1–19–2 Kabuki-cho. ☎ 03/3209-0702. Depending on the event, cover ¥3,000–¥3,500 (\$25–\$29), including 2 drinks. Station: Shinjuku (east exit, 10 min.). Beside Koma Stadium, a Shinjuku landmark.

Kento's Kento's was one of the first places to open when the wave of 1950s nostalgia hit Japan in the 1980s; it has even been credited with creating the craze. This is the place to come to if you feel like dancing the night away to tunes of the 1950s and 1960s played by live bands. Although there's hardly room to dance, that doesn't stop the largely over-30 Japanese audience from twisting in the aisles to the tunes of Elvis, Little Richard, The Temptations, Chuck Berry, and others. Hours are Monday through Saturday 6pm to 2:30am; Sunday and holidays 6 to 11:30pm. Daini Reine Bldg., 5–3–1 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3401-5755. Also at 6–7–12 Ginza; ☎ 03/3572-9161. Cover ¥1,000 (\$8.35) women, ¥1,500 (\$13) men, plus 10% service charge and 1 drink minimum. Station: Roppongi (4 min.). Take the side street going downhill on the left side of Almond Coffee Shop and then take the 1st left; the club will be on the right.

Lexington Queen Opened in 1980, Lexington Queen has been the reigning queen of disco in Tokyo for more than 2 decades. It's so much smaller than the newer, glitzier discos, it seems almost quaint. Its list of past guests reads like a Who's Who of foreign movie and rock stars who have visited Tokyo, from Rod Stewart to Stephen Dorff to Dustin Hoffman to Marilyn Manson; one night when I was there, Duran Duran walked in. This is the best place to be on Halloween and New Year's if you can stand the crowds. Women are admitted free Monday and Thursday. Daily 8pm to 5am. Daisan Goto Building, 3–13–14 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3401-1661. Cover ¥3,000 (\$25) for women, ¥4,000 (\$33) for men, including free drinks. Station: Roppongi (3 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, walk toward Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori and take the 2nd left.

Milk This split-level, psychedelic basement dance club packs 'em in with loud, loud, loud hard rock and alternative music. On Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights, it features live bands from 10:30pm. Daily 8 or 9pm to 4am. In the same building is the very popular **What the Dickens** ex-pat bar (see below). 1–13–3 Ebisu Nishi. ☎ 03/5458-2826. Cover usually ¥2,500–¥3,000 (\$21–\$25), including 1 drink. Station: Ebisu (west exit, 2 min.). Take the side street between Wendy's and KFC; Milk will be on your left.

Velfarre If you're looking for the disco scene, search no further. This huge, plush venue—run by a record group famous for its Eurobeat recordings—claims

to be Japan's largest disco and has all the latest technical gadgetry to match. Tokyo's disco of the moment, it attracts young Japanese dressed to kill (there's even a dress code: smart casual). Even the staff is stylishly dressed. The dance floor is absolutely gigantic; stage dancers help set the pace. Leading DJs from Tokyo and abroad play everything from pop and retro to techno, hard house, and—what else?—Eurobeat. **Note:** Unlike other discos, this one closes promptly at closing time. Open Thursday through Sunday from 7pm to 1am. 7–14–22 Roppongi. ☎ 03/3402-8000. Cover ¥3,000 (\$25), including 2 drinks. Station: Roppongi (3 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, take the 1st left after Ibis Hotel.

Yellow Closed on and off by the boys in blue in its early days, this is the closest thing Tokyo has to a true underground disco, staging the city's most progressive events, from Butoh performances (a modern minimalist form of dance) to gay nights. Guest DJs from abroad make appearances, playing a variety of music from salsa and reggae to hip-hop, soul, and techno. Only those in the know are supposed to come here, so there's no sign—just a blank, yellow neon square. Daily 10pm to 2 or 4am; occasionally closed for private functions, so call ahead. 1–10–11 Nishi-Azabu. ☎ 03/3479-0690. Cover ¥3,000 – ¥3,500 (\$25–\$29) including 1 or 2 drinks, depending on the DJ and the event. Station: Roppongi (10 min.). From Roppongi Crossing, head toward Shibuya on Roppongi Dori. Turn right at the next-to-last street before Gaien-Nishi Dori; it's on the 2nd block on the right.

THE BAR SCENE

GINZA If you're looking for a quiet place for a drink, you can't do better than (39) **Lupin** ★, 5–5–11 Ginza (☎ 03/3571-0750; station: Ginza, 2 min.), located in a tiny alley behind Ketel, a German restaurant on Namiki Dori. This tiny basement bar first opened back in 1928 and has changed little over the decades. Even the staff looks like they've been here since it opened. Because no music is played, it's a good place to come if you want to talk. Note that there's a ¥700 (\$5.85) snack/table charge. The bar is closed Sunday and Monday. Another good bar is the **Old Imperial** in the Imperial Hotel (☎ 03/3504-1111; station: Hibiya, 1 min.); the bar is the hotel's tribute to its original architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, and is the only place in the hotel with some Wright originals, including an Art Deco terracotta wall and a mural. With its low lighting and comfortable chairs and tables that are copies of Wright originals, it has a clubby, masculine atmosphere. Try a Mount Fuji, the bar's own cocktail original.

Nanbantei, just off Harumi Dori on Suzuran Dori near the Ginza 4-chome Crossing (☎ 03/3571-5700; station: Ginza, 2 min.), is one of a chain of yakitori-ya with English-language menus, friendly staff, good yakitori, and lots of beer, making it a great choice for foreign visitors. Another good yakitori-ya is **Atariya**, on the small street that runs behind Wako department store (☎ 03/3564-0045; station: Ginza, 3 min.); it also has an English-language menu for its yakitori (closed Sun).

Sapporo beer is the draw at **Sapporo Lion**, a large beer hall with a mock Gothic ceiling, on Chuo Dori not far from Matsuzakaya department store (☎ 03/3571-2590; station: Ginza, 3 min.). A large display of plastic foods and an English-language menu help you choose from snacks ranging from yakitori to sausage and spaghetti.

ASAKUSA Sky Room, on the 22nd floor of the Asahi Beer Tower, across the Sumida River from Sensoji Temple and next to the building that looks like a mug of beer (☎ 03/5608-5277; station: Asakusa, 4 min.), is a great place for an inexpensive drink after an active day in historic Asakusa. This inexpensive bar—a

simple cafeteria-type place—offers great views over the area as well as different kinds of Asahi beer, wine, coffee, tea, and cider, all priced at only ¥500 (\$4.15). It can be crowded on weekends, and note that the last order is taken at 8:30pm.

SHINJUKU Tiny ④ **Fukuriki Ichiza**, 1–1–10 Kabuki-cho (☎ 03/5291-5139; station: Shinjuku Sanchoe, 8 min.), with room for less than a dozen people, is typical of a multitude of miniature establishments that line the alleyways of Goruden Gai (see “The Major Entertainment Districts,” earlier in this section). However, unlike most of the establishments here, it welcomes foreigners and is a small, funky bar that attracts a young clientele with its Latin American music, Cuban beer and cigars, absinthe, pictures of Che Guevara, and kitsch.

Also near Hanazono Shrine, on the eighth floor of the Oriental Wave building on Yasukuni Dori, is one of weirdest theme bars I’ve seen in Tokyo, **Christon Café**, 5–17–13 Shinjuku (☎ 03/5287-2426; station: Shinjuku Sanchoe, 5 min.). Decorated like a church with its stained-glass windows, vaulted ceiling, organ music, crosses, and a statue of Jesus, it’s packed to the rafters despite the ¥300 (\$2.50) cover charge. What to order? A Bloody Mary, of course. More down-to-earth is the Irish bar **Dubliners**, behind Mitsukoshi on the second floor above Lion, 3–28–9 Shinjuku (☎ 03/3352-6606; station: Shinjuku, 3 min.), which attracts a mixed Japanese/ex-pat crowd.

Although most of Shinjuku’s night action is east of the station, **Vagabond**, 1–4–20 Nishi-Shinjuku on the second floor in the second alley behind—north of—Odakyu Halc (☎ 03/3348-9109; station: Shinjuku, west exit, 2 min.), is on the west side. It features a jazz pianist nightly and is popular with foreigners (especially Brits, who come for the Guinness). The place has been in operation for more than 25 years and is now managed by the original owner’s son, Matsuoka Takahiko. Closed on Sunday. Just down the street is ④ **Volga**, 1–4–18 Nishi Shinjuku (☎ 03/3342-4996; station: Shinjuku, west exit, 2 min.), a yakitori-ya in an ivy-covered, two-story brick building on the corner. Its unrefined atmosphere has changed little since its opening in the 1950s; the place is popular with middle-aged and older Japanese. Closed on Sunday.

HARAJUKU Mellow, dimly lit **Oh God**, 6–7–18 Jingumae (☎ 03/3406-3206; station: Meiji-Jingumae, 4 min.), features a mural of a city at sunset and shows free foreign films every night at 9pm, midnight, and 3am (also at 6pm on Fri, Sat, Sun, and holidays). I’ve seen everything from James Bond to Fassbinder to grade-B movies here; most of the “recent” releases are several years old. There are also two pool tables. This place is a godsend for travelers on a budget and is a good place to hang out.

EBISU Beer Station, located at the entrance to Yebisu Garden Place if you’re arriving via the moving walkway from Ebisu Station (☎ 03/3442-5111), is an attractive beer hall that’s a good imitation of a century-old brewery, just like you’d find in good old Bavaria; Bavarian oompah music even greets you at the entrance. There are several floors of dining and drinking, but the best place is the huge basement beer hall with its vaulted ceiling and huge pillars. There is also outdoor terrace seating, good for people-watching.

Ebisu’s most popular bar (especially with ex-pats) is **What the Dickens**, 1–13–3 Ebisu Nishi (☎ 03/3780-2088; station: Ebisu, west exit, 2 min.), which features free live bands nightly, English and Irish beer, and British pub grub. Take the side street that runs between Wendy’s and KFC; the bar is at the end of the second block on the left on the fourth floor. It’s closed on Monday. Personally, my favorite bar is the inimitable **Enjoy House**, 2–9–9 Ebisu Nishi (☎ 03/5489-1591; station:

Ebisu, west exit, 3 min.), with its 1960s-reminiscent decor, efficient yet relaxed and funky staff, friendly atmosphere, and tiny dance floor. Everyone here seems high and happy; the place is aptly named. Closed on Monday.

ROPPONGI Gaspanic Bar, 3–15–24 Roppongi (☎ 03/3405-0633; station: Roppongi, 3 min.), epitomizes Roppongi frenzy, attracting foreign and Japanese 20-somethings. The music is loud, and after midnight, this place can get so crowded that women have been known to dance on the countertops. Thursdays are especially crowded since all drinks go for only ¥400 (\$3.35). **Gaspanic Cafe**, downstairs, sells pizza by the slice, while in the basement is **Club 99**, open only on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday for dancing. Large bouncers at the door serve as clues that this place can get rough. From Roppongi Crossing, walk towards Tokyo Tower on Gaien-Higashi Dori, turning left at Hamburger Inn. Similar is the nearby **Hideout Bar**, on Gaien-Nishi Dori across from the Roi Building at 3–14–9 Roppongi (☎ 03/5775-7818). With its loud music and strong U.S. military presence, this place packs in 20-somethings like the Yamanote Line during rush hour.

If you like to dance but feel intimidated by the meat markets above, a fun choice is **Bodeguita**, 3–14–7 Roppongi (☎ 03/3796-0232; station: Roppongi, 3 min.), a small, crowded Cuban club featuring Latin music, Cuban cocktails, and good food, including *arroz con frijoles* (the classic rice and beans) and *arroz saltado* (rice, fried potatoes, and meat). There's live music Wednesdays, but the real crowd pleaser is the Cuban party held the last Saturday of most months. It's across from Gaspanic (above).

For a drink, I'm partial to **Geronimo**, 7–14–10 Roppongi (☎ 03/3478-7449; Roppongi, 1 min.), on Roppongi Dori opposite Almond Coffee Shop. A tiny place with a bar in the middle and ex-pats practically two-deep everywhere else, it's the kind of place where people dance, drink way too much, and party 'til they can't party any more. When the gong rings, it means someone is buying shots for everyone at the bar. But the most sane, sophisticated place for a drink is surely **Agave**, 7–15–10 Roppongi (☎ 03/3497-0229; station: Roppongi, 3 min.), a cellar bar boasting Japan's largest selection of tequila (more than 350 kinds), as well as cigars from the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Honduras, Mexico, and Jamaica. Closed on Sunday.

AKASAKA If your idea of a wild night is relaxing over a drink in a sophisticated lounge listening to live music (¥300/\$2.50 cover charge), head to the **Garden Lounge** at the Hotel New Otani (☎ 03/3265-1111; station: Nagatacho or Akasaka-mitsuke, 3 min.) before sunset. The bonus here is a view of a 400-year-old Japanese landscape garden, complete with a waterfall, a pond, bridges, and manicured bushes. For a more casual setting, try **Hobgoblin Tokyo Brewery Pub and Restaurant**, 2–13–19 Akasaka (☎ 03/3585-3681; station: Akasaka, exit 2, 2 min.), a British chain offering more draft beers than any other bar in town, major sporting events from its satellite TVs, darts, and hearty pub meals.

GAY & LESBIAN BARS

Shinjuku 2-chome (station: Shinjuku Sanjome), southeast of the Yasukuni-Gyoen Dori intersection, is Tokyo's gay and lesbian quarter, with a lively street scene and numerous establishments catering to a variety of age groups and preferences. The following are good starting points, but you'll find a lot more in the immediate area by exploring on your own. Attracting both gays and straights, **Advocates**, 2–18–1 Shinjuku (☎ 03/3358-3988), is a crowded, small bar open

to the street with a few sidewalk tables, making this a good vantage point from which to watch the street action. It's also a good place to network and find out about neighboring bars. **Kinsmen**, on the second floor at 2-18-5 Shinjuku (☎ 03/3354-4949), welcomes customers of all persuasions. It's a pleasant oasis, small and civilized, with a huge flower arrangement dominating the center of the room. It's closed on Tuesday. The casual, laid-back, women-only **Kinswomyn**, 2-15-10 Shinjuku (☎ 03/3354-8720), attracts a regular clientele of mainly Japanese lesbians and has a friendly, welcoming atmosphere. It's closed on Tuesday.

Side Trips from Tokyo

If your stay in Tokyo is long enough, you should consider taking an excursion or two. **Kamakura** and **Nikko** rank as two of the most important historical sites in Japan, while the **Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park** serves as a huge recreational playground for the residents of Tokyo. **Yokohama**, with its thriving port, waterfront development, and several museums and attractions, is an interesting day trip from Tokyo. For overnight stays, I recommend **Hakone**

or **Izu Peninsula**, since these resorts boast Japanese-style inns (*ryokan*) where you'll be able to experience the atmosphere of old Japan.

Before you depart Tokyo, stop by the Tourist Information Center (TIC) for pamphlets about Kamakura, Nikko, Hakone, and the Mount Fuji area, some of which give train schedules and other useful information; see "Visitor Information," in chapter 3 for the TIC location.

1 Kamakura, Ancient Capital ★★

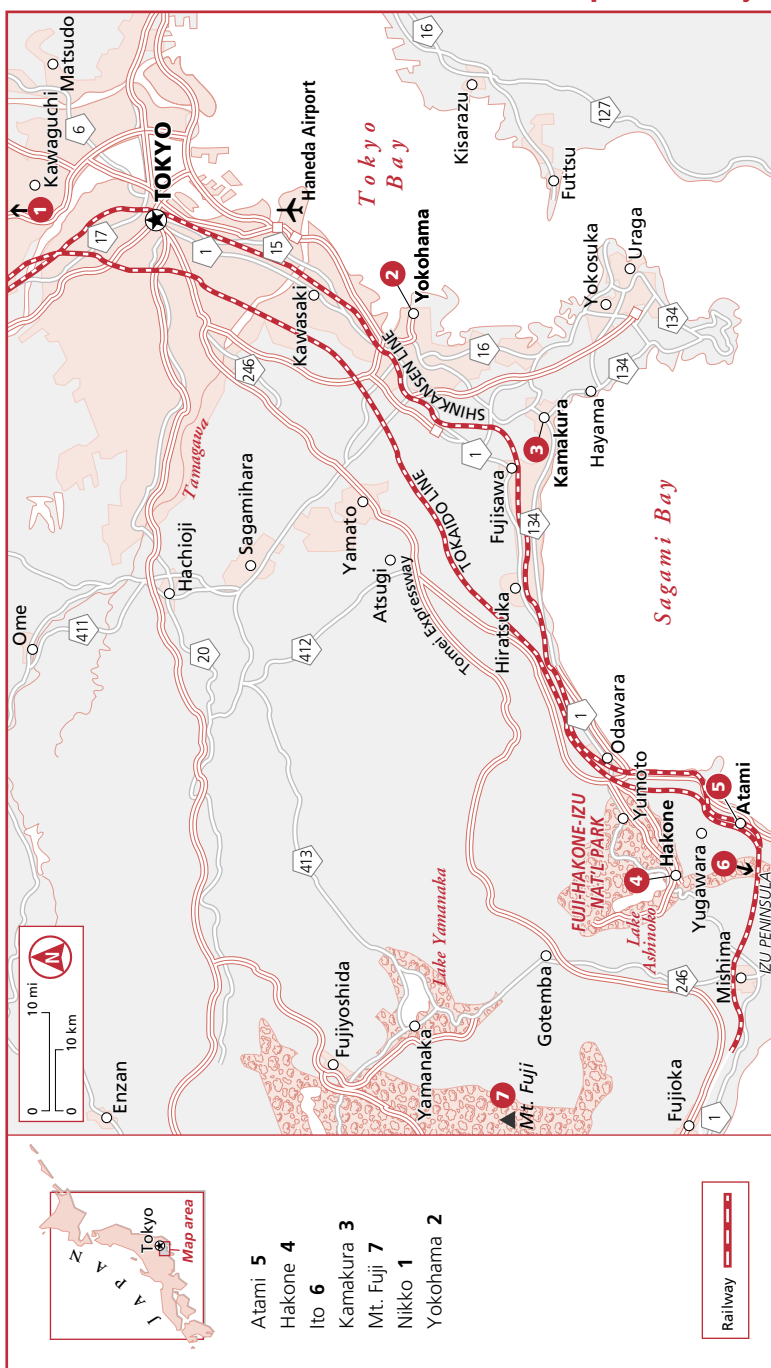
51km (32 miles) S of Tokyo

If you take only one day-trip outside Tokyo, it should be to Kamakura, especially if you're unable to include the ancient capitals of Kyoto and Nara in your travels. (If you are going to Kyoto and Nara, I would probably choose Nikko, below.) Kamakura is a delightful hamlet with no fewer than 65 Buddhist temples and 19 Shinto shrines spread throughout the village and surrounding wooded hills. Most of these were built centuries ago, when a warrior named Yoritomo Minamoto seized political power and established his shogunate government in Kamakura back in 1192. Wanting to set up his seat of government as far away as possible from what he considered to be the corrupt imperial court in Kyoto, Yoritomo selected Kamakura because it was easy to defend. The village is enclosed on three sides by wooded hills and on the fourth by the sea—a setting that lends a dramatic background to its many temples and shrines.

Although Kamakura remained the military and political center of the nation for a century and a half, the Minamoto clan was in power for only a short time. After Yoritomo's death, both of his sons were assassinated, one after the other, after taking up military rule. Power then passed to the family of Yoritomo's widow, the Hojo family, who ruled until 1333, when the emperor in Kyoto sent troops to crush the shogunate government. Unable to stop the invaders, 800 soldiers retired to the Hojo family temple at Toshiji, where they all disemboweled themselves in ritualistic suicide known as *seppuku*.

Today a thriving seaside resort with a population of 175,000, Kamakura—with its old wooden homes, temples, shrines, and wooded hills—makes a pleasant 1-day trip from Tokyo. (There's also a beach in Kamakura called Yuigahama Beach, but I find it unappealing; it's often litter-strewn and unbelievably crowded in summer. Skip it.)

Side Trips from Tokyo



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Take the **JR Yokosuka Line** bound for Zushi, Kurihama, or Yokosuka; it departs every 10 to 15 minutes from the Yokohama, Shinagawa, Shimbashi, and Tokyo JR stations. The trip takes almost 1 hour from Tokyo Station and costs ¥890 (\$7.40) one-way to Kamakura Station (free if you have a Japan Rail Pass).

VISITOR INFORMATION In Kamakura, there's a **tourist information window** (☎ 0467/22-3350; open daily 9am–5:30pm, to 5pm in winter) immediately to the right outside Kamakura Station's east exit in the direction of Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine. It sells a color brochure with a map of Kamakura for ¥200 (\$1.65); there's also a free map (in both English and Japanese), but it's not always in stock. Ask here for directions on how to get to the village's most important sights as well as its restaurants.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND Kamakura's major sights are clustered in two areas: **Kamakura Station**, the town's downtown with the tourist office, souvenir shops spread along Komachi Dori and Wakamiya Oji, restaurants, and Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine; and **Hase**, with the Great Buddha and Hase Kannon Temple. You can travel between Kamakura Station and Hase Station via the **Enoden Line**, a wonderful small train, or you can walk the distance in about 15 minutes. Destinations in Kamakura are also easily reached by buses that depart from Kamakura Station.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Keep in mind that most temples and shrines open at about 8 or 9am and close between 4 and 5pm.

AROUND KAMAKURA STATION About a 10-minute walk from Kamakura Station, **Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine** ★★☎ (☎ 0467/22-0315) is the spiritual heart of Kamakura and one of its most popular attractions. It was built by Yoritomo and dedicated to Hachiman, the Shinto god of war who served as the clan deity of the Minamoto family. The pathway to the shrine is along Wakamiya Oji, a cherry tree-lined pedestrian lane that was also constructed by Yoritomo back in the 1190s so that his oldest son's first visit to the family shrine could be accomplished in style with an elaborate procession. The lane stretches from the shrine all the way to Yuigahama Beach, with three

Tips Touring Kamakura

If you wish, an English-speaking **volunteer student guide** will escort you for free to Kamakura's major sights. They can be found most weekends outside the east exit of Kamakura Station between 10am to noon (try to arrive a little before 10am, before other visitors whisk them away). You can also reserve a guide at least a week prior to your visit by calling Tomoaki Saito at ☎ 090/9845-1290 or by e-mailing tomoa-saito@jp-t.ne.jp or kamakuraguide@hotmail.com. You should provide your name, country, number in your party, time and date of your request, and contact telephone number. In return for the student's service, it would be a nice gesture to reimburse him or her for transportation costs and to pay for lunch and admission fees.



ATTRACTIONS ●

- Great Buddha (Daibutsu) 6
- Hase Kannon Temple 8
- Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine 1
- Zeniarai-Benten Shrine 4

DINING ◆

- Kamakura Oboro 2
- Milano a Riccione 3
- Miyokawa 7
- Raitei 5

Fun Fact Murder & Betrayal at Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine

As you ascend the 62 steps to the vermilion-painted shrine, note the **ginkgo tree** to the left that's thought to be about 1,000 years old. This is supposedly the site where Yoritomo's second son was ambushed and murdered back in 1219; his head was never found. Such stories of murder and betrayal were common in feudal Japan. Fearful that his charismatic brother had designs on the shogunate, Yoritomo banished him and ordered him killed. Rather than face capture, the brother committed *seppuku*. When the brother's mistress gave birth to a boy, the baby was promptly killed. Today, the lotus ponds, arched bridge, pigeons, and bright vermilion sheen of the shrine give little clue to such violent history.

massive torii gates set at intervals along the route to signal the approach to the shrine. On both sides of the pathway are souvenir and antiques shops selling lacquerware, pottery, and folk art.

At the top of the stairs, which afford a panoramic view toward the sea, is the vermilion-colored shrine with its small shrine museum, not worth the ¥100 (85¢) admission. Shrine grounds are free to the public and are always open.

Although it's a bit out of the way, **Zeniarai-Benten Shrine** (☎ 0467/25-1081), about a 20-minute walk west of Kamakura Station, is dedicated to the goddess of good fortune. On Asian zodiac days of the snake, worshippers believe that if you take your money and wash it in spring water in a small cave on the shrine grounds, it will double or triple itself later on. This being modern Japan, don't be surprised if you see a bit of ingenuity; my Japanese landlady told me that when she visited the shrine she didn't have much cash on her, so she washed something that she thought would be equally as good—her credit card. As a shrine dedicated to the goddess of fortune, it fittingly offers free admission. Open daily 8am to 5pm.

AROUND HASE STATION To get to these attractions, you can go by bus, which departs from in front of Kamakura Station (take any bus from platform 1 or 6 to the Daibutsuen-mae stop). Or, for a more romantic adventure, you can go by the **JR Enoden Line**, a tiny train that putt-putts its way seemingly through back yards on its way from Kamakura Station to Hase and beyond. Since it's mostly only one track, trains have to take turns going in either direction. I suggest that you take the bus from Kamakura Station directly to the Great Buddha, walk to Hase Shrine, and then take the Enoden train back to Kamakura Station.

Probably Kamakura's most famous attraction is the **Great Buddha** ★★★ (☎ 0467/22-0703), called the *Daibutsu* in Japanese and located at **Kotokuin Temple**. Eleven meters (37 ft.) high and weighing 93 tons, it's the second-largest bronze image in Japan. The largest Buddha is in Nara, but in my opinion, the Kamakura Daibutsu is much more impressive. For one thing, the Kamakura Buddha sits outside against a dramatic backdrop of wooded hills. Cast in 1252, the Kamakura Buddha was indeed once housed in a temple like the Nara Buddha, but a huge tidal wave destroyed the wooden structure—and the statue has sat under sun, snow, and stars ever since. I also prefer the face of the Kamakura Buddha; I find it more inspiring and divine, as though with its half-closed eyes and calm, serene face it's somehow above the worries of the world. It seems to

represent the plane above human suffering, the point at which birth and death, joy and sadness merge and become one. Open daily from 7am to 6pm (to 5:30pm in winter); admission is ¥200 (\$1.65) for adults and ¥150 (\$1.25) for children, and your entry ticket is a bookmark, a nice souvenir. If you want, you can pay an extra ¥20 (15¢) to go inside the statue—it's hollow.

About a 10-minute walk from the Daibutsu is **Hase Kannon Temple** (★★★ or Hasedera (📍 0467/22-6300)), located on a hill with a sweeping view of the sea. This is the home of an 11-headed gilt statue of Kannon, the goddess of mercy, housed in the Kannon-do (Kannon Hall). More than 9m (30 ft.) high and the tallest wooden image in Japan, it was made from a single piece of camphor wood back in the 8th century. The legend surrounding this Kannon is quite remarkable. Supposedly, two wooden images were made from the wood of a huge camphor tree. One of the images was kept in Hase, not far from Nara, while the second was given a short ceremony and then duly tossed into the sea to find a home of its own. The image drifted 483km (300 miles) eastward and washed up on shore but was thrown back in again because all who touched it became ill or incurred bad luck. Finally, the image reached Kamakura, where it gave the people no trouble. This was interpreted as a sign that the image was content with its surroundings, and Hase Kannon Temple was erected at its present site. Note how each face has a different expression, representing the Kannon's compassion for various kinds of human suffering. In the Kannon-do, you'll also find the **Treasure House** with relics from the Kamakura, Heian, Muromachi, and Edo periods.

Another statue housed here is of **Amida**, a Buddha who promised rebirth in the Pure Land to the West to all who chanted his name. It was created by order of Yoritomo Minamoto upon his 42nd birthday, which is considered an unlucky year for men. You'll find it housed in the Amida-do (Amida Hall) beside the Kannon-do.

As you climb the steps to the Kannon-do, you'll encounter statues of a different sort. All around you will be likenesses of **Jizo**, the guardian deity of children. Although parents originally came to Hase Temple to set up statues to represent their children in hopes the deity would protect and watch over them, through the years the purpose of the Jizo statues has changed. Now they represent miscarried, stillborn, or aborted children. More than 50,000 Jizo statues have been offered here since the war, but the thousand or so you see now will remain only a year before being burned or buried to make way for others. Some of the statues, which can be purchased on the temple grounds, are fitted with hand-knitted caps and sweaters. The effect is quite chilling.

Hase Temple is open daily 8am to 5:30pm (to 4:30pm in winter); admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥100 (85¢) for children.

WHERE TO DINE

In addition to the choices below, a pavilion at Hase Kannon Temple (see above) serves inexpensive *oden*, noodles, beer, and soft drinks, with indoor and outdoor seating. Its great view makes it a good place for a snack on a fine day.

(42) **Kamakura Oboro** TOFU/VEGETARIAN Built in the traditional style of a *kura* (warehouse) with its whitewashed walls and dark wooden beams, this tofu restaurant offers simple but delicious vegetarian meals, including udon noodles with tofu, soba noodles with tofu and vegetables, and tofu kaiseki, as well as sweets made from red-bean paste. You can watch tofu being made at the entranceway; the dining room is upstairs.

1–8–25 Yukinoshita. ㊦ **0467/61-0570**. Main dishes ¥780–¥1,800 (\$6.50–\$15). No credit cards. Daily 11am–6pm. Station: Kamakura (8 min.). Between Komachi Dori and Wakamiya Oji streets, at the very end just before Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine.

Milano a Riccione ITALIAN This is the Japanese branch of a restaurant from Milan known for its handmade pasta, seafood, and good selection of wines. Although located in a basement, it opens onto a subterranean courtyard, making it brighter and more cheerful than you would expect. There's an English seasonal menu, but the best bargain is the daily set lunch for ¥1,300 (\$11), which gives you a choice of pasta, an appetizer, and coffee, espresso, or tea. It's also the quickest meal you can order; otherwise, if you're in a hurry, you should dine elsewhere, as care and time are devoted to the preparation of such meals as grilled scallops and leeks and roast chicken with zucchini and ham.

2–12–30 Komachi. ㊦ **0467/24-5491**. Pizza and pasta ¥950–¥1,700 (\$7.90–\$14); main dishes ¥1,800–¥2,400 (\$15–\$20); set dinner ¥3,800 (\$32); set lunches ¥1,300–¥2,500 (\$11–\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 11:30am–3pm and 5:30–9:30pm (last order). Station: Kamakura (6 min.). On the left side of Wakamiya Oji when walking from Kamakura Station to Tsurugaoka Hachimangu Shrine.

④3 **Miyokawa** MINI-KAISEKI/OBENTO This modern, casual restaurant specializes in kaiseki, including beautifully prepared mini-kaiseki set meals that change with the seasons. It also offers a great obento lunch box, the least expensive of which is served in a container shaped like a gourd, as well as a set meal featuring steak prepared Japanese style. The Miyokawa's takeout obento, priced at ¥2,000 (\$17) and under, can be eaten at the pavilion at Hase Temple.

1–16–17 Hase. ㊦ **0467/25-5556**. Reservations recommended. Mini-kaiseki ¥5,500–¥10,000 (\$46–\$83); obento ¥2,000–¥5,000 (\$17–\$42); Japanese steak set meal ¥3,500 (\$29). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–9pm. Station: Hase (5 min.). On the main road leading from Hase Station to the Great Buddha (about a 5-min. walk from each).

④4 **Raitei** ★★☆☆ *Finds* NOODLES/OBENTO Though it's a bit inconveniently located, this is the absolute winner for a meal in Kamakura. Visiting Raitei is as much fun as visiting the city's temples and shrines. The restaurant is situated in the hills on the edge of Kamakura, surrounded by verdant countryside, and the wonder is that it serves inexpensive soba (Japanese noodles) as well as priestly kaiseki feasts, which you must reserve in advance. If you're here for soba or one of the obento lunch boxes, go down the stone steps on the right to the back entry, where you'll be given an English-language menu with such offerings as noodles with chicken, mountain vegetables, tempura, and more. The pottery used here comes from the restaurant's own specially made kiln, and you'll dine sitting on roughly hewn wood stools or tatami.

Takasago. ㊦ **0467/32-5656**. Reservations required for kaiseki. Noodles ¥700–¥1,200 (\$5.85–\$10); obento lunch boxes ¥3,500–¥4,500 (\$29–\$38); soba set meals ¥2,500 (\$21); kaiseki feasts from ¥6,000 (\$50). At the front gate, you must pay an entry fee of ¥500 (\$4.15), which counts toward the price of your meal. AE, DC. Daily 11am–sundown (about 7pm in summer). Bus: 4 or 6 from platform 6 at Kamakura Station to Takasago stop (or a 15-min. taxi ride).

Moments A Special Stroll

When you've finished your meal at Raitei, be sure to walk the loop through the garden past a bamboo grove, stone images, and a miniature shrine. The stroll takes about 20 minutes, unless you stop for a beer at the refreshment house, which has outdoor seating and a view of the countryside.

2 Shogun Country: Nikko ★★

150km (93 miles) N of Tokyo

Since the publication of James Clavell's novel *Shogun*, many people have become familiar with Tokugawa Ieyasu, the powerful real-life shogun of the 1600s on whom Clavell's fictional shogun was based. Quashing all rebellions and unifying Japan under his leadership, Tokugawa established such a military stronghold that his heirs continued to rule Japan for the next 250 years without serious challenge.

If you'd like to join the millions of Japanese who through the centuries have paid homage to this great man, travel 150km (93 miles) north of Tokyo to Nikko, where **Toshogu Shrine** ★★ was constructed in his honor in the 17th century and where Tokugawa's remains were laid to rest in a mausoleum. Nikko means "sunlight"—an apt description of the way the sun's rays play upon this sumptuous shrine of wood and gold leaf. In fact, nothing else in Japan matches Toshogu Shrine for its opulence. Nearby is another mausoleum containing Tokugawa's grandson, as well as a temple, a shrine, and a garden. Surrounding the sacred grounds, known collectively as Nikko Sannai and designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1999, are thousands of majestic cedar trees in the 80,000-hectare (200,000-acre) **Nikko National Park** ★★. Another worthwhile sight is the **Nikko Tamozawa Imperial Villa**, built in 1899.

I've included a few recommendations for an overnight stay. Otherwise, you can see Nikko in a full day. Plan on 4 to 5 hours to Nikko and back, 2½ hours to see Toshogu Shrine and vicinity, and 1 hour to see the imperial villa.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The easiest, fastest, and most luxurious way to get to Nikko is on the privately owned Tobu Line's Limited Express, called the **Spacia**, which departs every hour or more frequently from Asakusa Station and costs ¥2,740 (\$23) one-way for the 2-hour trip (some trains require a transfer at Shimo-Imaichi Station). All seats are reserved, which means you are guaranteed a seat; if you're traveling on a holiday or a summer weekend, you may wish to purchase and reserve your ticket in advance. Another plus is that there's usually an English-speaking hostess on board who passes out pamphlets on the area and can answer sightseeing questions about Nikko.

Otherwise, you can also reach Nikko on Tobu's slower **rapid train** from Asakusa, which costs ¥1,320 (\$11) one-way and takes 2 hours and 10 minutes, with trains departing every hour or more frequently. There are no reserved seats, which means you might have to stand if trains are crowded.

If you have a Japan Rail Pass, take the Shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo or Ueno to Utsunomiya (there are departures every 20–40 min.; the trip takes about 50 min.) and change there for a rapid JR train to Nikko (45 min.).

VISITOR INFORMATION Before you leave Tokyo, pick up the leaflet "Nikko" from the Tourist Information Center (TIC). It gives the train schedule for both the Tobu Line, which departs from Asakusa Station, and the JR trains that depart from Ueno Station. The TIC also has some color brochures with maps of the Nikko area.

Nikko's Tobu and JR stations are located almost side by side in the village's downtown area. The **Nikko Tobu Station tourist information counter** (☎ 0288/53-4511), located inside Tobu Station to the right after you pass through the wicket gate, is staffed by a friendly woman who speaks enough English to give you

a map, answer basic questions, and point you in the right direction. You can also make hotel and ryokan reservations here for free. Open daily 8:30am to noon and 1 to 5pm.

Another tourist office, the **Nikko Information Center** (☎ 0288/54-2496), is located on the left side of the main road leading from the train station to Toshogu Shrine (next to Eneos gas station). It has English-speaking staff and lots of information in English about Nikko, including information on public hot springs. Open daily from 8:30am to 5pm.

GETTING AROUND Toshogu Shrine and its mausoleum are on the edge of town, but you can walk from either the JR or Tobu train stations to the shrine in about half an hour. Simply head straight out the main exit, pass the bus stands, and then turn right. Signs in English point the way through town. Keep walking on this main road (you'll pass the Nikko Information Center about halfway down on the left side, as well as souvenir shops) until you come to a T intersection with a vermilion-colored bridge spanning a river (about a 15-min. walk from the train stations). The stone steps opposite lead up the hill into the woods and to Toshogu Shrine. You can also travel from Tobu Station by bus, getting off at either the Shinkyo bus stop (a 5-min. ride) or the Nishi Sando bus stop (a 7-min. ride).

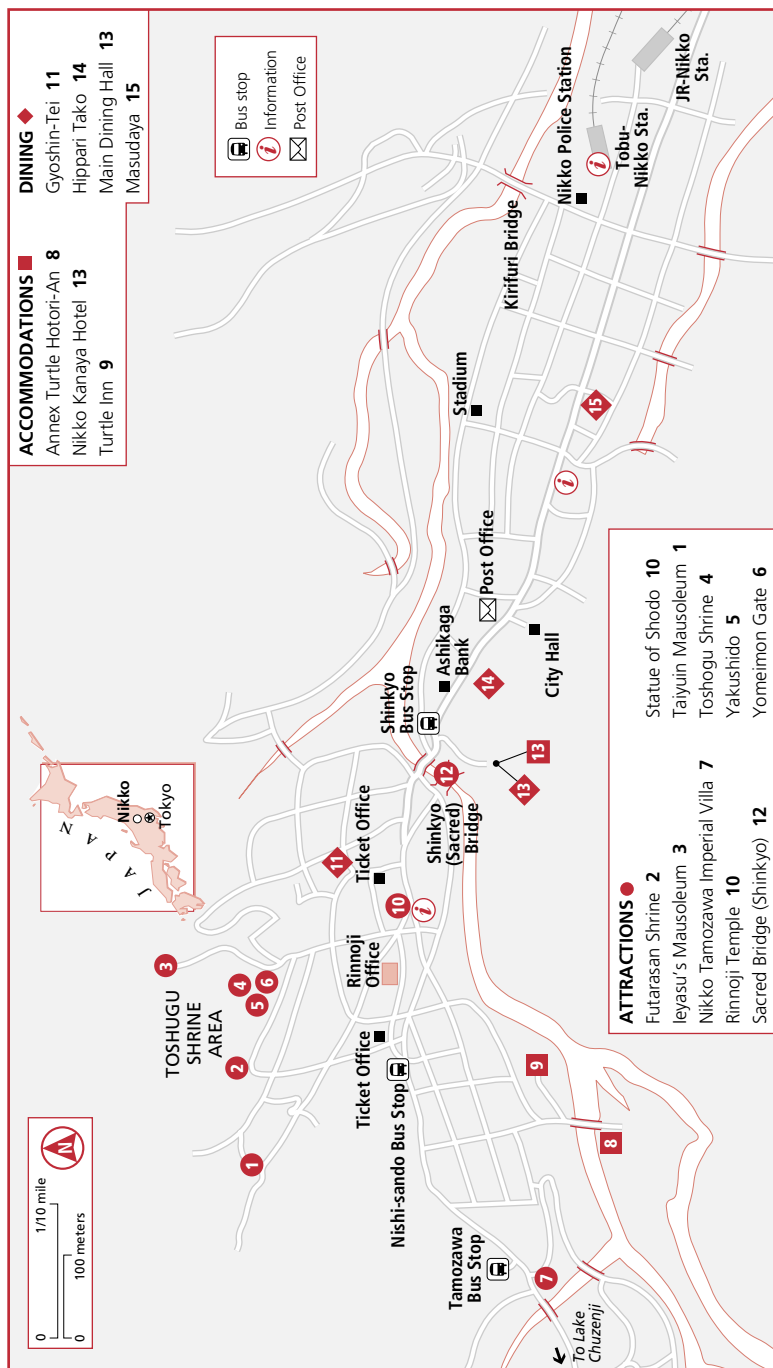
SEEING THE SIGHTS

ON THE WAY TO THE SHRINE The first indication that you're nearing the shrine is the vermilion-painted **Sacred Bridge (Shinkyo)** arching over the rushing Daiyagawa River. It was built in 1636, and for more than 3 centuries only shogun and their emissaries were allowed to cross it. Even today, mortal souls like us are prevented from completely crossing it because of a barrier at one end.

Across the road from the Sacred Bridge are steps leading uphill into a forest of cedar where, after a 5-minute walk, you'll see a statue of **Shodo**, a priest who founded Nikko 1,200 years ago at a time when mountains were revered as gods. In the centuries that followed, Nikko became one of Japan's greatest mountain Buddhist retreats, with 500 sub-temples spread through the area. Behind Shodo is the first major temple, Rinnoji Temple, where you can buy a **combination ticket** for ¥1,000 (\$8.35) that allows entry to Rinnoji Temple, Toshogu Shrine, neighboring Futarasan Shrine, and the other Tokugawa mausoleum, Taiyuin. Once at Toshogu Shrine, you'll have to pay an extra ¥520 (\$4.35) to see Ieyasu's tomb. Combination tickets sold at the entry to Toshogu Shrine already include Ieyasu's tomb. It doesn't really matter where you buy your combination ticket since you can always pay the extra fee to see sights not covered. A note for bus riders: If you take the bus to the Nishi Sando bus stop, the first place you'll come to is the Taiyuin Mausoleum, where you can also purchase a combination ticket.

Toshogu Shrine and the other sights in Nikko Sannai are open daily April to October from 8am to 5pm (to 4pm the rest of the year); you must enter at least 30 minutes before closing time.

RINNOJI TEMPLE Rinnoji Temple was founded by the priest Shodo in the 8th century, long before the Toshogu clan came onto the scene. Here you can visit **Sanbutsudo Hall**, a large building that enshrines three 8.4m (28-ft.) high, gold-plated, wooden images of Buddha, considered the "gods of Nikko"; today people pray here for world peace. Perhaps the best thing to see at Rinnoji Temple, however, is its **Shoyo-en Garden** (opposite Sanbutsudo Hall), which requires a separate ¥300 (\$2.50) admission. Completed in 1815 and typical of Japanese landscaped gardens of the Edo Period, this small strolling garden provides a different vista at each turn in the path, making it seem much larger than it actually is.



TOSHOGU SHRINE ★★ The most important and famous structure in Nikko is Toshogu Shrine, built by Tokugawa's grandson (and 3rd Tokugawa shogun), Tokugawa Iemitsu, as an act of devotion. It seems that no expense was too great in creating the monument: Some 15,000 artists and craftspeople were brought to Nikko from all over Japan, and after 2 years' work, they erected a group of buildings more elaborate and gorgeous than any other Japanese temple or shrine. Rich in colors and carvings, Toshogu Shrine is gilded with 2.4 million sheets of gold leaf (they could cover an area of almost 2.4 hectares/6 acres). The mausoleum was completed in 1636, almost 20 years after Ieyasu's death, and was most certainly meant to impress anyone who saw it as a demonstration of the Tokugawa shogunate's wealth and power.

Toshogu Shrine is set in a grove of magnificent ancient **Japanese cedars** planted over a 20-year period during the 1600s by a feudal lord named Mutsudaira Masatsuna. Some 13,000 of the original trees are still standing, adding a sense of dignity to the mausoleum and the shrine.

You enter Toshogu Shrine via a flight of stairs that passes under a huge stone torii gateway, one of the largest in Japan. On your left is a five-story, 35m (115-ft.) high **pagoda**. Although normally pagodas are found only at temples, this pagoda is just one example of how both Buddhism and Shintoism are combined at Toshogu Shrine. After climbing a second flight of stairs, turn left and you'll see the **Sacred Stable**, which houses a sacred white horse. Horses have long been dedicated to Shinto gods and are kept at shrines. Shrines also kept monkeys as well, since they were thought to protect horses from disease; look for the three monkeys carved above the stable door, fixed in the pose of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil"—they're considered guardians of the sacred horse. Across from the stable is **Kami-Jinko**, famous for its carving by Kano Tanyu, who painted the images of the two elephants after reading about them but without ever seeing what they actually looked like.

Up the next flight of stairs, to the left, is **Yakushido**, famous for its dragon painting on the ceiling. If you clap your hands under the painting, the echo supposedly recalls a dragon's roar. You also can visit the shrine's main sanctuary, the **Hai-den**, comprising three halls: One was reserved for the imperial family, one for the shogun, and one (the central hall) for conducting ceremonies. You can buy good-luck charms here that will guard against such misfortunes as traffic accidents or that insure good health, success in business, easy childbirth, or luck in other aspects of daily life.

But the central showpiece of Nikko is **Yomeimon Gate**, popularly known as the Twilight Gate, implying that it could take you all day (until twilight) to see everything carved on it. Painted in red, blue, and green and decorated with gilt and lacquerwork, this gate has about 400 carvings of flowers, dragons, birds, and other animals. It's almost too much to take in at once and is very un-Japanese in its opulence, having more in common with Chinese architecture than the usual austerity of most Japanese shrines.

To the right of the main hall is the entrance to **Tokugawa Ieyasu's mausoleum**. If it's not already included in your combination ticket, admission is ¥520 (\$4.35). After the ticket counter, look for the carving of a sleeping cat above the door, dating from the Edo Period and famous today as a symbol of Nikko (you'll find many reproductions in area souvenir shops). Beyond that are 200 stone steps leading past cedars to Tokugawa's tomb. After the riotous colors of the shrine, the tomb seems surprisingly simple.

FUTARASAN SHRINE Directly to the west of Toshogu Shrine is Futarasan Shrine, the oldest building in the district (from 1617), which has a pleasant garden and is dedicated to the gods of mountains surrounding Nikko. You'll find miniature shrines dedicated to the god of fortune, god of knowledge, god of health, and god of good marriages. On the shrine's grounds is the so-called **ghost lantern**, enclosed in a small wooden structure. According to legend, it used to come alive at night and sweep around Nikko in the form of a ghost. It apparently scared one of the guards so much that he struck it with his sword 70 times, the marks of which are still visible on the lamp's rim. (Entrance to these sights is ¥200/\$1.65 extra.)

TAIYUIN MAUSOLEUM ★ Past Futarasan Shrine is **Taiyuin Mausoleum**, the final resting place of Iemitsu, the third Tokugawa shogun (look for his statue). Completed in 1653, it's not nearly as large nor as crowded as Toshogu Shrine, but is ornate and serenely elegant nevertheless, making it a pleasant last stop on your tour of Nikko Sannai.

NIKKO TAMOZAWA IMPERIAL VILLA (Tamozawa Goyoutei Kinen Koen) ★★ If you haven't seen the imperial villas of Kyoto (which require advance planning), the Nikko Tamozawa Imperial Villa, 8–27 Honcho (☎ 0288/53-6767), is a great alternative. Though not as old (it was built in 1899 for Prince Yoshihito, who later became the Taisho Emperor) and recently painstakingly restored so that it looks brand new, it has the distinction of being the largest wooden imperial villa of its era, with 106 rooms (37 of which are open to the public). The central core of the villa is actually much older, constructed in 1632 by a feudal lord and brought to Nikko from Edo (present-day Tokyo). A self-guided tour of the villa provides insight into traditional Japanese architectural methods—from its 11 layers of paper-plastered walls to its nail-less wood framing—not to mention how Japan's aristocracy lived. Be sure to wander the small, outdoor garden. Admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, half price for children. Open Wednesday to Monday 9am to 4:30pm. It's about a 20-minute walk from Toshogu Shrine; or take the bus to the Tamozawa stop.

WHERE TO STAY

If it's peak season (May, Aug, Oct) or a weekend, it's best to reserve a room in advance, which you can do by calling directly or through a travel agency in Tokyo. Otherwise, if it's not peak season, you can also make a reservation upon arrival at Nikko Tobu Station, either at the **tourist information counter**, where the service is free; or at the **accommodations reservation window** (☎ 0288/54-0864; open daily 9am–5pm), which charges a ¥200 to ¥500 (\$1.65–\$4.15) fee but is familiar with the accommodations in the area and will make all arrangements for you.

MODERATE

Nikko Kanaya Hotel ★★ *Finds* This distinguished-looking, old-fashioned place on a hill above the Sacred Bridge is the most famous hotel in Nikko, combining the rustic heartiness of a European country lodge with elements of old Japan. It was founded in 1873 by the Kanaya family, who wished to offer accommodations to foreigners, mainly missionaries and businessmen looking to escape the heat and humidity of Tokyo. The present complex, built in spurts over the past 100 years, has a rambling, delightfully old-fashioned atmosphere that fuses Western architecture with Japanese craftsmanship. Through the decades it has played host to a number of VIPs, from Charles Lindbergh to Indira Gandhi to Shirley MacLaine; Frank Lloyd Wright left a sketch for the bar fireplace, which was later built to his

design. Even if you don't stay here, you might want to drop by for lunch (see below). Pathways lead to the Daiyagawa River and several short hiking trails.

All rooms are Western-style twins, with the differences in price based on room size, view (river view is best), and facilities. They're rather simple but cozy and have character; some have antiques and claw-foot tubs. If you want to stay in the best room in the house, a corner room in the 70-year-old wing where the emperor once stayed, you'll pay the highest price below.

1300 Kami-Hatsuishi, Nikko City, Tochigi 321-1401. ☎ 0288/54-0001. Fax 0288/53-2487. www.kanayahotel.co.jp. 70 units (68 with shower/tub and toilet, 2 with toilet only). ¥8,000 (\$67) single with toilet only, ¥10,000 (\$83) single with shower and toilet, ¥11,000 – ¥35,000 (\$92–\$292) single with bathroom; ¥10,000 (\$83) twin with toilet only, ¥12,000 (\$100) twin with shower and toilet, ¥13,000 – ¥40,000 (\$108–\$333) twin with bathroom. ¥3,000 (\$25) extra on Sat and evenings before national holidays; ¥5,000 (\$42) extra in peak season. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: From Nikko Tobu Station to the Shinkyo stop, a 5-min. ride. On foot: 15 min. from Tobu Station. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (shabu-shabu, Western, and coffee shop); bar; small outdoor heated pool (open only in summer and free for hotel guests); outdoor skating rink (in winter); souvenir shops; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar.

INEXPENSIVE

Annex Turtle Hotori-An ★★ *Kids* Owned by the super-friendly family that runs Turtle Inn (see below), this is one of my favorite places to stay in Nikko. One dip in the hot-springs bath overlooking the Daiyagawa River (which you can lock for privacy) will tell you why; at night, you're lulled to sleep by the sound of the rushing waters. A simple but spotless, modern structure (all non-smoking), it's located in a nice rural setting on a quiet street with a few other houses; an adjoining park and playground provide plenty of space for kids to play. All its rooms except one are Japanese style. A plentiful Western-style breakfast costs ¥1,000 (\$8.35) in the pleasant living area/dining room. For dinner, you can go to the nearby Turtle Inn (not available Sun and Thurs; reservations should be made by 10am), or buy a pizza from the freezer and microwave it yourself. There's also a communal refrigerator where you can store your food

8–28 Takumi-cho, Nikko City, Tochigi 321-1433. ☎ 0288/53-3663. Fax 0288/53-3883. www.turtle-nikko.com. 11 units (all with bathroom). ¥5,800 (\$48) per person. AE, MC, V. Bus: From Nikko Station to the Sogo Kaikan-mae stop, a 7-min. ride; then a 9-min. walk. **Amenities:** Computer with free Internet access at Turtle Inn; hot-spring baths; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Turtle Inn ★ This excellent, nonsmoking pension, a Japanese Inn Group member, is located within walking distance of Toshogu Shrine in a newer two-story house on a quiet side street beside the Daiyagawa River. It's run by the very friendly Fukuda family. Mr. Fukuda speaks English and is very helpful in planning a sightseeing itinerary for the area. Rooms are bright and cheerful in both Japanese and Western styles; the five tatami rooms are without bathroom. Excellent Japanese dinners are available for ¥2,000 (\$17), as are Western breakfasts for ¥1,000 (\$8.35). Be sure to order dinner by 10am and note that it's not available on Sunday and Thursday.

2–16 Takumi-cho, Nikko City, Tochigi 321-1433. ☎ 0288/53-3168. Fax 0288/53-3883. www.turtle-nikko.com. 10 units (3 with bathroom). ¥4,200 (\$35) single without bathroom, ¥5,000 (\$42) single with bathroom; ¥8,400 (\$70) double without bathroom, ¥10,000 (\$83) double with bathroom. AE, MC, V. Bus: From Nikko Station to the Sogo Kaikan-mae stop, a 7-min. ride; then a 5-min. walk. **Amenities:** Computer with free Internet access; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE EXPENSIVE

Main Dining Hall at Nikko Kanaya Hotel ★★ *Finds* CONTINENTAL Even if you don't spend the night here, you might want to come for a meal in

the hotel's quaint dining hall with its wood-carved pillars. It's one of the best places in town for lunch. Since it's beside the Sacred Bridge, only a 10-minute walk from Toshogu Shrine, you can easily combine it with your sightseeing tour of Nikko. I suggest Nikko's specialty, locally caught rainbow trout available in three different styles of cooking. I had mine cooked Kanaya style, covered with soy sauce, sugar, and sake; grilled; and served whole. The best bargain is the set lunch for ¥2,800 (\$23). Available until 3pm, it comes with soup; salad; a main dish such as trout; bread or rice; and dessert. Steak, lobster, salmon, chicken, and other Western fare are also listed on the English-language menu.

Nikko Kanaya Hotel, 1300 Kami-Hatsuishi. ☎ 0288/54-0001. Reservations recommended during peak season. Main dishes ¥2,500–¥8,000 (\$21–\$67); set lunches ¥2,800–¥10,000 (\$23–\$83); set dinners ¥7,000 (\$58). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–3pm and 6–8pm. Station: Nikko Tobu (15-min.).

MODERATE

Gyoshin-Tei ★★ VEGETARIAN/KAISEKI This lovely Japanese restaurant, with a simple tatami room and a view of pines, moss, and bonsai, serves two kinds of set meals—kaiseki and Buddhist vegetarian cuisine—both of which change monthly and include the local specialty, *yuba* (see Masudaya, below). It's one of several restaurants in a parklike setting all under the same management and with the same open hours. Meiji-no-Yakata (closed Wed), occupying a stone house built 110 years ago as the private retreat of an American businessman, serves Western food such as grilled rainbow trout, veal cutlet, and steak, with set meals ranging from ¥3,800 to ¥8,000 (\$32–\$67). Fujimoto (closed Thurs), in a small stone cottage, serves French food created with Japanese ingredients and eaten with chopsticks. The drawback: This place is harder to find than this guidebook's other recommendations, though it's only a 4-minute walk northeast of Rinnoji Temple.

2339-1 Sannai. ☎ 0288/53-3751. Reservations recommended. Vegetarian/kaiseki meals ¥3,500 (\$29) and ¥5,000 (\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 11am–7pm (from 11:30am in winter). A 25-min. walk from Nikko Tobu Station; or take a bus from Nikko Station to Seikoen (then a 1-min. walk).

Masudaya ★ YUBA Only two fixed-price meals are served at this Japanese-style, 80-year-old restaurant, both featuring *yuba*. A high-protein food made from soybeans, *yuba* is a local specialty produced only in Kyoto and Nikko. Until 100 years ago, it could be eaten only by priests and members of the imperial family. Now you can enjoy it, too, along with such sides as rice, sashimi, soup, fried fish, and vegetables. Dining is either in a common dining hall (make reservations 2 days in advance) or, for the more expensive meals, in private tatami rooms upstairs, for which you should make a reservation 1 week in advance.

439 Ichiyamachi. ☎ 0288/54-2151. Reservations required. *Yuba* kaiseki meals ¥3,900 (\$33) and ¥5,200 (\$43). No credit cards. Fri–Wed 11am–4pm (open Thurs if a holiday). Station: Nikko Tobu (5 min.). On the left side of the main street leading from Tobu Station to Toshogu Shrine, just before the fire station.

INEXPENSIVE

④5 **Hippari Tako** NOODLES This tiny, three-table establishment is under the caring supervision of motherly Miki-san, who serves a limited selection of noodle dishes, including ramen and stir-fried noodles with vegetables as well as *onigiri* (rice balls) and yakitori. There's an English-language menu, and the walls, covered with business cards and messages left by appreciative guests from around the world, are testimony to both the tasty meals and Miki-san's warm hospitality.

1011 Kami-Hatsuishi. ☎ 0288/53-2933. Main dishes ¥500–¥800 (\$4.15–\$6.65). No credit cards. Daily 11am–7pm (last order). Station: Nikko Tobu (15 min.). On the left side of the main street leading from Toshogu Shrine, 1 min. before the Nikko Kanaya Hotel and the Sacred Bridge.

3 Yokohama, City of the 21st Century

29km (18 miles) S of Tokyo

There are few attractions in Yokohama to warrant a visit if you're just in Japan for a short time. However, if you find yourself in Tokyo for an extended period, Yokohama is a pleasant destination for an easy day trip. Be sure to make time for wonderful Sankei-en Garden; although a mere 90-some years old, it ranks on my long list as one of the top gardens in Japan.

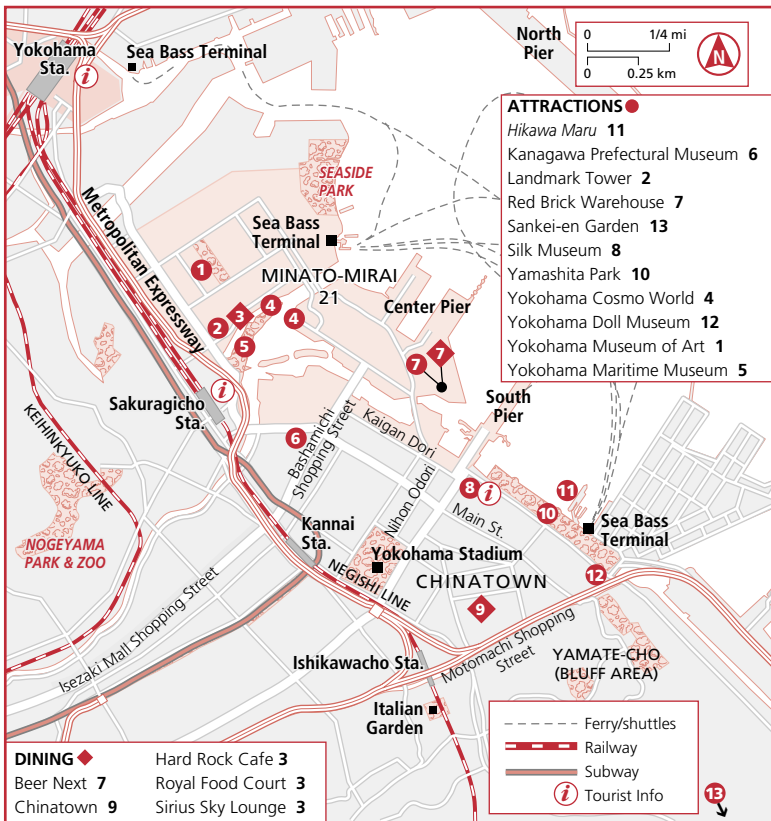
A rather new city in Japan's history books, Yokohama was nothing more than a tiny fishing village when Commodore Perry arrived in the mid-1800s and demanded that Japan open its doors to the world. The village was selected by the shogun as one of several ports to be opened for international trade, transforming it from a backwater to Japan's most important gateway. Yokohama subsequently grew by leaps and bounds and was a pioneer when it came to Western goods and services, boasting Japan's first bakery (1860), photo studio (1862), beer brewery (1869), daily newspaper (1870), public restroom (1871), and ice cream (1879) among other things.

Now Japan's second-largest city with a population of almost 3.5 million, Yokohama remains the nation's largest international port and supports a large international community, with many foreigners residing in the section called the Bluff. Yokohama has an especially large Chinese population and Japan's largest Chinatown, whose restaurants serve as a mecca for hungry Tokyoites. Befitting a city known for its firsts, for the past decade Yokohama has been developing Japan's largest urban development project to date, the **Minato-Mirai 21**, with a conference center, museums, hotels, and restaurants. In addition to Sankei-en Garden, Yokohama also boasts a handful of specialty museums. Hard to imagine that a mere 140-some years ago, Yokohama was a village of 100 houses.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Because many Yokohama residents work in Tokyo, it's as easy to get to Yokohama as it is to get around Tokyo. Although Yokohama Station is the city's main train station, I suggest taking a train from Tokyo that will deposit you directly at Sakuragicho or Kannai station in Yokohama, since most attractions are clustered here. (If you want to visit Sankei-en Garden, take the train to Yokohama Station and transfer there for bus no. 8.) Most convenient is probably the **JR Keihin-Tohoku Line**, which travels through Ueno, Tokyo, Yurakucho, Shimbashi, and Shinagawa stations before continuing on to Yokohama, Sakuragicho, and Kannai stations, with the journey from Tokyo Station to Sakuragicho Station taking approximately 43 minutes. From Shibuya, the express (not the local, which makes too many stops) **Tokyu-Toyoko Line** travels to Yokohama Station or Sakuragicho Station (but not Kannai) in about 30 minutes. Additionally, both the **JR Yokosuka Line** and **JR Tokaido Line** depart from Tokyo and Shinagawa stations, but they go only to Yokohama Station, where you'll have to transfer either to a bus (for Sankei-en Garden) or the subway (for Sakuragicho or Kannai). In any case, fares to Sakuragicho average ¥300 to ¥450 (\$2.50–\$4.15), depending on which line you take and which station you start from.

VISITOR INFORMATION There are several tourist information centers in Yokohama, but probably the most convenient and easiest to find is the **Sakuragicho Station Tourist Information Center** (☎ 045/211-0111; open



daily 9am–7pm), located in a kiosk outside Sakuragicho Station in the direction of Minato-Mirai 21 and its Landmark Tower. The main office, the **Yokohama Convention & Visitors Bureau**, is located in the Sangyo Boeki Center (nicknamed Sambo Center), 2 Yamashita-cho, Naka-ku (☎ 045/641-4759; open Mon–Fri 9am–5pm), an easy walk from Kannai Station and close to the Silk Center and Yamashita Park. Both have excellent city maps and brochures.

Next door to the Convention and Visitors Bureau, in the Silk Center, is the **Kanagawa Prefectural Tourist Office** (☎ 045/681-0007; open Mon–Fri 9am–5:30pm), where you can also get information on Hakone and Kamakura, both in Kanagawa Prefecture.

GETTING AROUND Yokohama Station is connected to Sakuragicho and Kannai stations (which are close to most of Yokohama's attractions) by commuter train, subway, and bus. The **JR Keihin-Tohoku Line** from Tokyo passes through Yokohama Station and continues on to Sakuragicho and Kannai stations. The **Tokyu-Toyoko Line** goes only to Yokohama and Sakuragicho stations. Sakuragicho Station is the first stop from Yokohama Station by train (2nd by subway), Kannai the second. Bus no. 8, which travels from Yokohama Station to Sankei-en Garden, also passes Minato-Mirai 21, Chinatown, and Yamashita Park.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

A good plan for sightseeing would be to take the train to Sakuragicho to see the sights at Minato-Mirai 21, walk to Yamashita Park for the attractions there (about a 30-min. walk, stopping, perhaps at the Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History or Red Brick Warehouse on the way), and then board bus no. 8 for Sankei-en Garden (keeping in mind, of course, that most attractions close by 4:30 or 5pm). If you want to visit the garden first, board bus no. 8 at Yokohama Station.

AROUND SAKURAGICHO STATION There's no mistaking the **Minato-Mirai 21** when you see it—it looks like a vision of the future with its dramatic monolithic buildings. Already boasting a huge state-of-the-art convention facility, three first-class hotels, Japan's tallest building, office buildings, two great museums, and an amusement park, the area is still under construction; upon completion, it will encompass 184 hectares (460 acres) housing 10,000 residents and employing 190,000. It's all a bit too sterile for my taste, but its two museums make a visit here worthwhile.

If you arrive by train or subway, take the moving walkway that connects Sakuragicho Station to the Landmark Tower in Minato-Mirai 21 in 5 minutes.

There are several shopping malls in Minato-Mirai 21, including Queen's Square, Yokohama World Porter's, Landmark Plaza, Jack Mall, and the restored Red Brick Warehouse, but the area's most conspicuous building is the **Landmark Tower**, Japan's tallest building. The fastest elevator in the world will whisk you 270m (900 ft.) in about 40 seconds to the 69th floor, where there's an observation room called **Sky Garden** (☎ 045/222-5030), open daily from 10am to 9pm (to 10pm Sat). From here you can see the harbor with its container port and Yokohama Bay Bridge, as well as almost the entire city and even, on clear days in winter, Mount Fuji. However, its admission of ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults, ¥800 (\$6.65) for seniors and high-school students, ¥500 (\$4.15) for elementary and junior-high students, and ¥200 (\$1.65) for children make it too expensive in my book. Better is the Landmark Tower's 70th-floor **Sirius Sky Lounge** (see below); although there's a cover charge, its atmosphere is more relaxing.

It would be hard to miss **Yokohama Cosmo World** (☎ 045/641-6591), an amusement park spread along both sides of a canal: It boasts one of the largest Ferris wheels in the world. Other diversions include a roller coaster that looks like it dives right into a pond (but vanishes instead into a tunnel), a haunted house, a simulation theater with seats that move with the action, kiddie rides, a games arcade, and much more. Admission is free but rides cost extra, usually ¥300 to ¥700 (\$2.50–\$5.85) each. It's open 11am to 8pm (to 10pm July 20–Aug); closed most Thursdays and weekdays in February.

The most important thing to see at Minato-Mirai 21 is the **Yokohama Museum of Art** ★, 3–4–1 Minato-Mirai (☎ 045/221-0300), which emphasizes works by Western and Japanese artists since the 1850s. The museum's ambitious goal is to collect and display works reflecting the mutual influences on the modern art of Europe and that of Japan since the opening of Yokohama's port in 1859. The light and airy building, designed by Kenzo Tange and Urtec Inc., features exhibits from its permanent collection—which includes works by Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Leger, Max Ernst, Dalí, and Japanese artists—that change three times a year (you can tour its four rooms in about 30 min.), as well as special exhibits on loan from other museums. Open Friday through Wednesday from 10am to 6pm (closed the day following a national holiday). Admission

for the permanent collection is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for high-school and college students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children. Special exhibitions cost more. You'll spend at least an hour here.

Maritime buffs should check out the **Yokohama Maritime Museum**, 2-1-1 Minato-Mirai (☎ 045/221-0280), which concentrates on Yokohama's history as a port, beginning with the arrival of Perry's "Black Ships." Other displays chart the evolution of ships from Japan and around the world from the 19th century to the present, with lots of models of everything from passenger ships to oil tankers. Kids like the three telescopes connected to cameras placed around Yokohama and the captain's bridge with a steering wheel; sailing fans enjoy touring the 96m (320-ft.), four-masted *Nippon-Maru* moored nearby, built in 1930 as a sail-training ship for students of the merchant marines. Admission is ¥600 (\$5) for adults and ¥300 (\$2.50) for children. Open 10am to 5pm (to 6:30pm in July and Aug, to 4:30pm Nov-Feb). The museum is closed the fourth Monday of every month; the *Maru* is closed every Monday. It takes more than an hour to see everything.

History buffs should wander over to the **Kanagawa Prefectural Museum of Cultural History**, or Kanagawa Kenritsu Rekishi Hakubutsukan, 5-60 Minaminaka-dori (☎ 045/201-0926), located between Sakuragicho Station and Yamashita Park (see below), or about a 7-minute walk from either Sakuragicho or Kannai Station. It's housed in a Renaissance-style building constructed in 1904 as the nation's first modern foreign-exchange bank, but the interior has been completely renovated. Start by taking the escalator up to the third floor, where you'll begin a chronological odyssey through Kanagawa Prefecture's history from the Paleolithic Period 30,000 years ago to the opening of Yokohama Port and the modernization of Japan. I found the model villages throughout the various periods especially fascinating. Check out the four large-scale drawings of foreigners dating from the 19th century—they have distinct Japanese features despite the blue eyes. (The one on the left is Commodore Perry.) There are also models of both Perry's ships and Japan's first train, which ran between Tokyo and Yokohama. Open Tuesday through Sunday from 9:30am to 5pm; admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for students, and free for seniors and children. Plan on about 45 minutes here.

Shoppers might want to swing by the **Red Brick Warehouse (Aka Renga)**, located in the Shinko-cho District of Minato-Mirai 21 (☎ 045/227-2002; station: Sakuragicho or Kannai, about a 15-min. walk from both), located about halfway between Minato-Mirai 21 and Yamashita Park. This restored waterfront warehouse is home to dozens of shops selling crafts, furniture, housewares, clothing, and jewelry, as well as restaurants, with most shops open daily 11am to 8pm.

IN & AROUND YAMASHITA PARK You can walk to Yamashita Park from Minato-Mirai 21 in less than 30 minutes. Otherwise, it's about a 10-minute walk from Kannai Station, which is three stops by subway (two by commuter train) from Yokohama Station.

Laid out after the huge 1923 earthquake that destroyed much of Tokyo and Yokohama, Yamashita Park is Japan's first seaside park, a pleasant place for a stroll along the waterfront where you have a view of the city's mighty harbor and Bay Bridge. Moored alongside the park is the *Hikawa-Maru* (☎ 045/641-4361), a 1930 ocean liner that transported 25,000 passengers between Yokohama and North America before being called to military service during World War II. One of the few Japanese ships to survive the war, it now serves as a museum, with its

engine room, bridge, sleeping quarters (including the captain's room and a state-room once occupied by Charlie Chaplin), deck, and more on display. In summer from 5 to 9pm daily, the city's most unique beer garden sprawls on a top deck. *Hikawa-Marui* is open daily 9:30am to 9:30pm in summer and 9:30am to 6:30pm in winter. Admission is ¥800 (\$6.65) for adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) for children 6 to 15 years old, and ¥300 (\$2.50) for children 3 to 5. It takes about 30 minutes to walk through the ship.

Across the ginkgo-lined street from Yamashita Park are two worthwhile special-interest museums. At the west end (closest to Minato-Mirai 21) is the **Silk Museum** (★☆☆, 1 Yamashita-cho, Naka-ku (☎ 045/641-0841)). For many years after Japan opened its doors, silk was its major export, and most of it was shipped to the rest of the world from Yokohama, the nation's largest raw-silk market. In tribute to the role silk has played in Yokohama's history, this museum has displays showing the metamorphosis of the silkworm and the process by which silk is obtained from cocoons, all well documented in English; from April to October you can even observe live cocoons and silk worms at work (compared to the beauty they produce, silk worms are amazingly ugly). The museum also displays various kinds of silk fabrics, as well as gorgeous kimono and reproduction Japanese costumes from the Nara, Heian, and Edo periods. Don't miss this museum, which takes about 30 minutes to see; surprisingly, it's never crowded. Open Tuesday through Sunday from 9am to 4:30pm; admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for seniors, ¥200 (\$1.65) for students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children 6 to 11.

At the opposite end of Yamashita Park is the **Yokohama Doll Museum**, 18 Yamashita-cho (☎ 045/671-9361), which houses approximately 9,000 dolls from 139 countries around the world. Its main floor displays antique dolls, including those produced by such famous doll makers as Lenci and Jumeau, as well as dolls from around the world dressed in native costume. The upstairs floor is devoted to Japanese dolls, including folk dolls traditionally sold at shrines and temples, classical Edo-Period dolls, *hina* (elaborate dolls representing the empress and emperor, used for the March Hina Festival), and *kokeshi* (simple wooden dolls). Open 10am to 6:30pm, it's closed the third Monday of every month. Admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults and ¥150 (\$1.25) for children. Plan on spending about 30 to 45 minutes here.

Not far from Yamashita Park is **Chukagai**, Japan's largest Chinatown with hundreds of souvenir shops and restaurants; see "Where to Dine," below.

SANKEI-EN GARDEN (★☆☆ In my opinion, **Sankei-en Garden** (☎ 045/621-0634) is the best reason to visit Yokohama. Although not old itself, this lovely park contains more than a dozen historical buildings that were brought here from other parts of Japan, including Kyoto and Nara, all situated around streams and ponds and surrounded by Japanese-style landscape gardens. The park, which is divided into an Inner Garden and Outer Garden, was laid out in 1906 by Tomitaro Hara, a local millionaire who made his fortune exporting silk. As you wander along the gently winding pathways, you'll see a villa built in 1649 by the Tokugawa shogunate clan, tea arbors, a 500-year-old three-story pagoda, and a farmhouse built in 1750 without the use of nails. The gardens are well known for their blossoms of plums, cherries, wisteria, azaleas, irises, and water lilies, but no matter what the season, the views here are beautiful.

Plan on at least 2 hours to see both gardens. Sankei-en is open daily from 9am to 5pm (you must enter the Inner Garden by 4pm, the Outer Garden by 4:30pm); admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for the Outer Garden and another ¥300 (\$2.50) for the Inner Garden (¥60/50¢ and ¥120/\$1 respectively for children). The easiest way to reach Sankei-en Garden is by bus no. 8, which departs from platform no. 2 at Yokohama Station's east exit (near Sogo department store) and winds its way past Sakuragicho Station, past Chinatown, and through Kannai before reaching the Honmoku-Sankeien-mae bus stop 30 minutes later (the bus stop is announced in English).

WHERE TO DINE

MINATO-MIRAI 21 For casual, inexpensive, and fast dining with a view, head to the Landmark Plaza shopping mall at the base of Landmark Tower, where on the fifth floor you'll find the large, American-style **Royal Food Court** (☎ 045/222-5566) with a half-dozen self-serve counters offering different kinds of foods. You can dine here for less than ¥1,200 (\$10). Among the options are ramen noodles, curry rice, a salad bar, and Chinese dishes. Some seats have a view of the harbor and Yokohama Bay Bridge. Open daily from 11am to 9pm.

For more sophisticated surroundings or just a romantic evening cocktail (no children allowed after 5pm), take the elevator up to the 70th floor of Landmark Tower, where you'll find the Yokohama Royal Park Hotel Nikko's **Sirius Sky Lounge** ♡ (☎ 045/221-1111), with stunning seaside views. It serves a buffet lunch for ¥3,500 (\$29) daily from 11:30am to 2:30pm, with choices of Asian and Continental dishes that may range from sautéed chile shrimp to pizza. After lunch, you can also come for a drink during teatime until 5pm. From 5pm to 1am daily, Sirius is a cocktail lounge and levies a cover charge: ¥1,000 (\$6.65) per person from 5 to 7pm and again from 11pm to 1am; there's also a charge of ¥2,000 (\$17) for live music from 7 to 11pm.

The 1911 renovated Red Brick Warehouse (see above) also has fast-food outlets, but for something more substantial, head to the third floor for **Beer Next** (☎ 045/226-1961), which admirably strives to create an international cuisine that goes down well with beer. Pizza, pasta, rotisserie roast chicken, and a pickled cabbage, sausage, and corned pork stew are just some of the dishes offered, with prices ranging from ¥1,200 to ¥2,200 (\$10–\$18). It's open daily 11am to 11pm.

Finally, another good place for a drink or a hamburger is the local branch of the **Hard Rock Cafe**, located on the first floor of Queen's Square Yokohama Tower A (☎ 045/682-5626; open daily 11am–11pm).

CHUKAGAI (CHINATOWN) Located in Yamashita-cho, a couple blocks inland from Yamashita Park, Chinatown has more than 500 restaurants and shops lining one main street and dozens of offshoots. Tokyoites have long been coming to Yokohama just to dine here; many of the restaurants have been owned by the same families for generations. Most serve Cantonese food and have plastic-food displays, English-language menus, or photos of their dishes, so your best bet is to wander around and let your budget be your guide. Most dishes run ¥800 to ¥3,000 (\$6.65–\$25), and set lunches go for ¥800 to ¥1,200 (\$6.65–\$10). Larger restaurants accept credit cards; those that do display them on the front door. Most Chinatown restaurants are open from 11am or 11:30am to 9:30pm or later; some close Tuesday or Wednesday, but there are always restaurants open. Chinatown is about a 15-minute walk from Kannai Station or a 10-minute walk from Ishikawacho Station.

4 Climbing Japan's Most Famous Mountain: Mount Fuji (☆☆)

100km (62 miles) SW of Tokyo

Mount Fuji, affectionately called “Fuji-san” by the Japanese, has been revered since ancient times. Throughout the centuries, Japanese poets have written about it, painters have painted it, pilgrims have flocked to it, and more than a few people have died on it. Without a doubt, this mountain has been photographed more than anything else in Japan.

Mount Fuji is stunningly impressive. At 3,716m (12,388 ft.), it's the tallest mountain in Japan, towering far above anything else around it, a cone of almost perfectly symmetrical proportions. Mount Fuji is majestic, grand, and awe-inspiring. To the Japanese, it symbolizes the very spirit of their country. Though it's visible on clear days (mostly in winter) from as far as 161km (100 miles) away, Fuji-san is, unfortunately, almost always cloaked in clouds. If you catch a glimpse of this elusive mountain (which you can sometimes do from the bullet train between Tokyo and Nagoya), consider yourself extremely lucky. One of the best spots for views of Mount Fuji is **Hakone** (see below).

ESSENTIALS

There are six ascending trails to the summit of Mount Fuji (and six descending trails), each divided into 10 stages of unequal length with most climbs starting at the Go-go-me, or the Fifth Stage. From Tokyo, **Kawaguchiko Trail** is the most popular and most accessible, as well as the least steep. Although the “official” climbing season is from mid-July to the end of August, you can climb Mount Fuji April through October, weather permitting.

GETTING THERE The easiest way to reach Kawaguchiko Trail's Fifth Stage is by **bus** from Shinjuku Station, and most trips require a change of buses at Kawaguchiko Station. There are some 15 buses a day in operation between Shinjuku and Kawaguchiko Station from mid-July to the end of August, with less frequent service April through mid-July and September through October. The bus ride from Shinjuku Station, with departures a 2-minute walk from the west side of the station in front of the Yasuda Seimi No. 2 Building at bus platform no. 50, takes about 1 hour and 45 minutes and costs ¥1,700 (\$14) one-way to Kawaguchiko Station. Note that you must make a reservation for this bus through **Keio Kosoku Bus Yoyaku Center** (☎ 03/5376-2222) or a travel agency such as JTB. Less frequent buses depart from Tokyo Station's Yaesu south exit for the same price.

From Kawaguchiko Station there are buses onward to the Fifth Stage; the trip takes approximately 45 minutes and costs another ¥1,700 (\$14). During the official climbing season, a handful of buses travel directly from Shinjuku Station to Kawaguchiko Trail's Fifth Stage, costing ¥2,600 (\$22) one-way and taking almost 2½ hours. Note that bus service is suspended in winter, when Mount Fuji is blanketed in snow and is considered too dangerous for novice climbers. Otherwise, buses generally run April through October to the Fifth Stage unless there is inclement weather (including snow), though far less frequently than during the official season.

If you want to use your Japan Rail Pass, you can leave from Tokyo's Shinjuku Station via the **JR Chuo Line** to Otsuki, where you change to the **Fuji Kyuko Line** for Kawaguchiko Station (note, however, that you must pay an extra ¥1,100/\$9.15 for the last leg of the journey). The entire trip takes about 2 hours. From Kawaguchiko Station, you can then take the 45-minute bus ride onward to the Fifth Stage.

VISITOR INFORMATION More information and train and bus schedules can be obtained from the **Tokyo Tourist Information Center**, including a leaflet called “Mount Fuji and Fuji Five Lakes.” See “Visitor Information,” in chapter 3.

CLIMBING MOUNT FUJI

Mount Fuji is part of a larger national park called **Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park** ★★. Of the handful of trails leading to the top, most popular for Tokyo-ites is the **Kawaguchiko Trail**, which is divided into 10 different stages; the Fifth Stage, located about 2,474m (8,250 ft.) up and served by bus, is the usual starting point. From here it takes about 6 hours to reach the summit and 3 hours to make the descent.

PREPARING FOR YOUR CLIMB You don't need climbing experience to ascend Mount Fuji (you'll see everyone from grandmothers to children making the pilgrimage), but you do need stamina and a good pair of walking shoes. It's possible to do it in tennis shoes, but if the rocks are wet, they can get awfully slippery. You should bring a light plastic raincoat (which you can buy at souvenir shops at the Fifth Stage) since it often rains on the mountain, a sun hat, a bottle of water, a sweater for the evening, and a flashlight if you plan on hiking at night. It gets very chilly on Mount Fuji at night. Even in August, the average temperature on the summit is 43°F (6°C).

Because of snow and inclement weather from fall through late spring, the best time to make an ascent is during the “official” climbing season from mid-July to August 31. This is also when buses run most frequently. However, it's also the most crowded time of the year. Consider the fact that there are more than 120 million Japanese, most of whom wouldn't dream of climbing the mountain outside the “official” 1½ months it's open, and you begin to get the picture. About 600,000 people climb Fuji-san every year, mostly in July and August and mostly on weekends—so if you plan on climbing Mount Fuji on a Saturday or a Sunday in summer, go to the end of the line, please.

Don't be disappointed when your bus deposits you at **Kawaguchiko Fifth Stage**, where you'll be bombarded with souvenir shops, restaurants, and busloads of tourists; most of these tourists aren't climbing to the top. As soon as you get past them and the blaring loudspeakers, you'll find yourself on a steep rocky path, surrounded only by scrub brush and the hikers on the path below and above you. After a couple hours, you'll probably find yourself above the roily clouds, which stretch in all directions. It will be as if you are on an island, barren and rocky, in the middle of an ocean.

STRATEGIES FOR CLIMBING TO THE TOP The usual procedure for climbing Mount Fuji is to take a morning bus, start climbing in early afternoon, spend the night near the summit, get up early in the morning to climb the rest of the way to the top, and then watch the sun rise (about 4:30am) from atop Mount Fuji. (You can, of course, also wake up in time to see the sun rise and then continue climbing.) At the top is a 1-hour hiking trail that circles the crater. Hikers then begin the descent, reaching the Fifth Stage about noon.

There are about 20 **mountain huts** along the Kawaguchiko Trail above the Fifth Stage, but they're very primitive, providing only futons and toilet facilities, some with a capacity to house 500 hikers. The cost is ¥5,000 (\$42) per person without meals, ¥7,000 (\$58) with meals. When I stayed in one of these huts, dinner consisted of dried fish, rice, bean-paste soup, and pickled vegetables; breakfast was exactly the same. Still, unless you want to carry your own food, I'd opt for the

Fun Fact The First Climbers

The first documented case of someone scaling Mount Fuji is from the early 8th century. During the Edo Period, pilgrimages to the top were considered a purifying ritual, with strict rules governing dress and route. Women, thought to defile sacred places, were prohibited from climbing mountains until 1871.

meals. Note that huts are open only July and August; book as early as you can to assure a place. I recommend the **Toyokan Hut** at the Seventh Stage (☎ 0555/22-1040) or the **Taishikan Hut** at the Eighth Stage (☎ 0555/22-1947). Call the **Japanese Inn Union of Mount Fuji** at ☎ 0555/22-1944 for more information.

In the past few decades, there's been a trend in which climbers arrive at the Fifth Stage late in the evening and then climb to the top through the night with the aid of flashlights. After watching the sunrise, they then make their descent. That way, they don't have to spend the night in one of the huts.

Climbing Mount Fuji is definitely a unique experience, but there's a saying in Japan: "Everyone should climb Mount Fuji once; only a fool would climb it twice."

5 Hakone: By Mountain Tram, Cable Car, Ropeway & Boat (★☆☆)

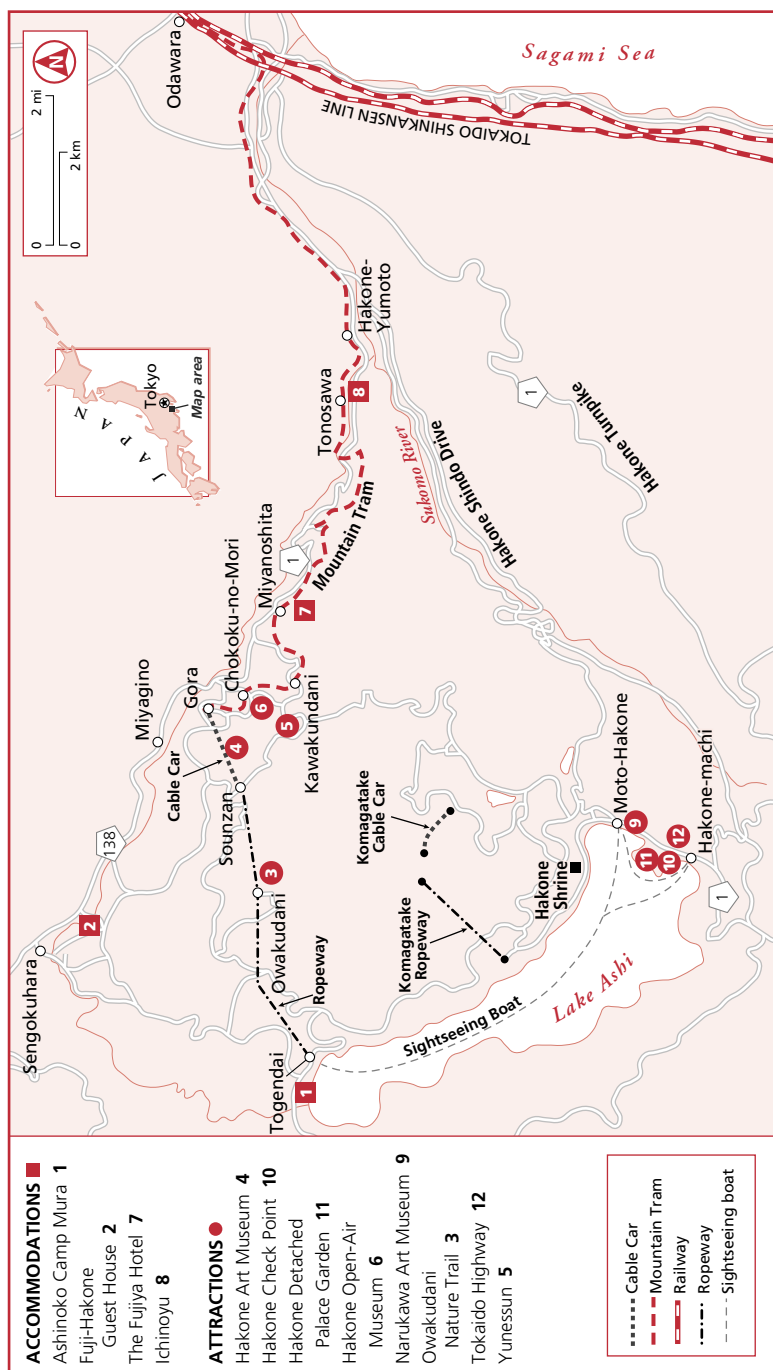
97km (60 miles) SW of Tokyo

Part of the **Fuji-Hakone-Izu National Park** (★★), Hakone is one of the closest and most popular destinations for residents of Tokyo. Beautiful Hakone has about everything a vacationer could wish for—hot-spring resorts, mountains, lakes, breathtaking views of Mount Fuji, and interesting historical sites. You can tour Hakone as a day trip if you leave early in the morning and limit your sightseeing to a few key attractions, but adding an overnight stay—complete with a soak in a hot-spring tub—is much more pleasant. If you plan to return to Tokyo, I suggest that you leave your luggage in storage at your Tokyo hotel or Shinjuku Station and travel to Hakone with only an overnight bag. If you're traveling onward, say, to Kyoto, leave your bags at a check-in counter at Hakone Yumoto Station.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND Getting to and around Hakone is half the fun! An easy, circular tour you can follow through Hakone includes various forms of unique transportation: Starting out by train from Tokyo, you then switch to a small two-car tram that zigzags up the mountain, change to a cable car and then to a smaller ropeway, and end your trip with a boat ride across Lake Ashi, stopping off to see major attractions along the way. From Lake Ashi (that is, from the villages of Togendai, Hakone-machi, or Moto-Hakone), you can then board a bus bound for Odawara Station (an hour's ride), where you can then board the train back to Tokyo. These same buses also pass all the recommendations listed below, useful if you wish to complete most of your sightseeing the first day before you go to your hotel for the evening. There is also a direct bus between Togendai and Shinjuku.

Odakyu (☎ 03/3481-0103) operates the most convenient network of trains, buses, trams, cable cars, and boats to and around Hakone. The most economical



and by far easiest way to see Hakone is with Odakyu's **Hakone Free Pass**, which, despite its name, isn't free but does give you a round-trip ticket on the express train from Shinjuku Station to Odawara or Hakone Yumoto and includes all modes of transportation in Hakone listed above and covered below. The pass avoids the hassle of having to buy individual tickets and also provides nominal discounts on most of Hakone's attractions. Several variations of the pass are available; the most common, valid for 3 days, costs ¥5,500 (\$46) for adults (half fare for children). The trip from Shinjuku to Odawara takes 1½ hours, and trains run approximately every 30 minutes. In Odawara, you then transfer to the electric mountain tram. Some express trains go all the way to Hakone Yumoto, where you can then board the mountain tram, with the trip from Shinjuku taking 2 hours.

If you can, travel on a weekday. The **Hakone Weekday Pass**, which is good only Monday through Thursday, is valid for 2 days and costs ¥4,700 (\$39) for adults, half price for children. Not only are weekdays less crowded, but some hotels offer cheaper weekday rates, which means you'll save all around. Note, however, that the Weekday Pass is not available during peak times, including Golden Week and summer school vacation (mid-July to Aug).

If time is of the essence or you want to be assured a seat during peak season, I recommend reserving a seat on the faster and more luxurious **Odakyu Romance Car**, which travels from Shinjuku all the way to Hakone Yumoto in 1½ hours and costs an extra ¥870 (\$7.25) one-way.

If you have a **Japan Rail Pass**, you should take the Shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo Station to Odawara (not all bullet trains stop there, so make sure yours does). From there, you can buy a Hakone Free Pass that includes travel on Odakyu private railways, cable cars, buses, and boats for ¥4,130 (\$34); it's valid for 3 days. The Weekday Pass costs ¥3,410 (\$26).

All passes described above can be purchased at any station of the Odakyu Railway, including Shinjuku Station and Odawara.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before you leave Tokyo, pick up the "Hakone and Kamakura" leaflet available from the Tourist Information Center; it lists the schedules for the extensive transportation network throughout the Hakone area. A color brochure called "Hakone National Park" includes sightseeing information and contains a map of the Hakone area. See "Visitor Information," in chapter 3 for TIC locations.

In Shinjuku Station, be sure to stop by the **Odakyu Sightseeing Service Center** (located on the ground floor near the west exit of Odakyu Shinjuku Station; ☎ 03/5321-7887; www.odakyu-group.co.jp/english; open daily 8am–6pm), where you can obtain sightseeing information, purchase Hakone Free Pass tickets and, if you wish, buy 1- or 2-day do-it-yourself package tours that include round-trip transportation to Hakone, meals, sightseeing, and hotel stays.

In Hakone Yumoto, there's the **Yumoto Tourist Office** (☎ 0460/5-8911; open daily 9:30am–5:30pm), where you can pick up more pamphlets on Hakone and can ask directions. It's a 2-minute walk from the Hakone Yumoto Station. Take a right out of the station onto the town's main street; the office is on the left.

EXPLORING HAKONE

STRATEGIES FOR SEEING HAKONE If you plan on spending only a day in Hakone, you should leave Tokyo very early in the morning and visit just a few key attractions—I recommend the **Hakone Open-Air Museum**, the **Owakudani nature trail** and, if time permits, the **Hakone Check Point** and/or **Narukawa Art Museum**.

If you're spending the night—and I strongly urge that you do—you can arrange your itinerary in a more leisurely fashion and devote more time to Hakone's attractions. You may wish to travel only as far as your hotel the first day, stopping at sights along the way and in the vicinity. The next day you could continue with the rest of the circuit through Hakone. Or, you can opt to complete most of your sightseeing the first day, and then backtrack to your accommodations or reach it by bus from Togendai, Hakone-machi, or Moto-Hakone.

SCENIC RAILWAY TO GORA Regardless of whether you travel via Shinkansen, the Odakyu Romance Car, or the ordinary Odakyu express, you'll end up at either Odawara Station, considered the gateway to Hakone, or a bit farther along at Hakone Yumoto Station, located in Hakone itself. At either station, you can transfer to the **Hakone Tozan Railway**, a delightful, mountain-climbing, two-car electric tram that winds its way through forests and over streams and ravines as it travels upward to Gora, making several switchbacks along the way. The entire trip from Hakone Yumoto Station to Gora takes only 45 minutes, but it's a beautiful ride on a narrow track through the mountains. This is my favorite part of the whole journey. The trains, which run every 10 to 15 minutes, make about a half-dozen stops before reaching Gora, including **Tonosawa** and **Miyanoshita**, two hot-spring spa resorts with a number of old ryokan and hotels. Some of these ryokan date back several centuries, to the days when they were on the main thoroughfare to Edo, called the old Tokaido Highway. Miyanoshita is also the best place for lunch. See "Where to Dine" and "Where to Stay," below.

As for things to do along the way, you can begin your trip with some relaxing, hot-spring bathing at the thoroughly modern, sophisticated public bath called **Yunessun** ★★ (☎ 0460/2-4126). About a 15-minute taxi or bus ride from the Kowakudani stop on the Hakone Tozan Railway, this self-described "Mediterranean Style Spa Resort" offers a variety of both indoor and outdoor family baths, which means you wear your bathing suit. In addition to indoor Turkish, Roman, and salt baths, there's also a small children's play area with slides and a large outdoor area with a variety of small baths, including those mixed with coffee, sake, rose petals, or healthy minerals. For those who desire more traditional bathing, there's the Mori No Yu, with both indoor and outdoor baths separated for men and women (you don't wear your suit here). Most people who come stay 2 to 3 hours. Admission is ¥3,500 (\$29) to Yunessun, ¥1,800 (\$15) to Mori No Yu, and ¥4,000 (\$33) to both; children pay half fare. Upon admission, you'll be given a towel, robe, and wristband to pay for drinks and extras (rental suits are available), so you can leave all valuables in your assigned locker. It's open daily 9am to 7pm (Mori No Yu is open to 8pm).

The most important stop on the Hakone Tozan Railway is the next-to-the-last stop, Chokoku-no-Mori, where you'll find the famous **Hakone Open-Air Museum (Chokoku-no-Mori Bijutsukan)** ★★★ (☎ 0460/2-1161; www.hakone-oam.or.jp) a minute's walk from the station. With the possible exception of views of Mount Fuji, this museum is, in my opinion, Hakone's number one attraction. Using nature itself as a dramatic backdrop, it showcases sculpture primarily of the 20th century in a spectacular setting of glens, formal gardens, ponds, and meadows. There are 700 sculptures on display, both outdoors and in several buildings, with works by Carl Milles, Manzu Giacomo, Jean Dubuffet, Willem de Kooning, Barbara Hepworth, Joan Miró, and more than 20 pieces by Henry Moore. The Picasso Pavilion contains more than 200 works by Picasso from pastels to ceramics (it's one of the world's largest collections), while the Picture Gallery

displays paintings by Miró, Renoir, Kandinsky, Vlainck, Utrillo, and Takeshi Hayashi. There are several installations geared toward children where they can climb and play. I could spend all day here; barring that, count on staying at least 2 hours. When you're done, an informal cafe provides a peaceful view. Open daily from 9am to 5pm (to 4pm Dec–Feb); admission is ¥1,600 (\$13) for adults, ¥1,100 (\$9.15) for university and high-school students and seniors, and ¥800 (\$6.65) for children. Your Hakone Free Pass gives you a ¥200 (\$1.65) discount.

BY CABLE CAR TO SOUNZAN Cable cars leave Gora every 20 minutes or so and arrive 9 minutes later at the end station of Sounzan, making several stops along the way as they travel steeply uphill. One of the stops is Koen-Kami, from which it's only a minute's walk to the **Hakone Art Museum** (☎ 0460/2-2623). This five-room museum displays Japanese pottery and ceramics from the Jomon Period (around 4000–2000 B.C.) to the Edo Period, including terra-cotta *haniwa* burial figures, huge 16th-century Bizen jars, and Imari ware. What makes this place particularly rewarding are the bamboo grove and small but lovely moss garden with a teahouse where you can sample Japanese tea for ¥630 (\$5.25). It is most beautiful in autumn. Open Friday through Wednesday from 9am to 4:30pm (to 4pm in winter); admission is ¥900 (\$7.50) for adults, ¥400 (\$4.15) for university and high-school students and seniors, and free for children. The Hakone Free Pass gives a ¥200 (\$1.65) discount. Plan on spending about a half-hour here, more if you opt for tea.

BY ROPEWAY TO TOGENDAI From Sounzan, you board a ropeway with gondolas for a long, 30-minute haul over a mountain to Togendai on the other side, which lies beside Lake Ashi, known as Lake Ashinoko in Japanese. Note that the ropeway stops running at 5 or 5:30pm in summer and 4pm in winter.

Before reaching Togendai, however, get off at the first stop, Owakudani, the ropeway's highest point, to hike the 30-minute **Owakudani Nature Trail** ★. Owakudani means “Great Boiling Valley,” and you'll soon understand how it got its name when you see (and smell) the sulfurous steam escaping from fissures in the rock, testimony to the volcanic activity still present here. Most Japanese commemorate their trip here by buying boiled eggs cooked in the boiling waters, available at the small hut midway along the trail.

ACROSS LAKE ASHI BY BOAT From Togendai you can take a pleasure boat across Lake Ashi, also referred to as “Lake Hakone” in some English brochures. Believe it or not, one of the boats plying the waters is a replica of a man-of-war pirate ship. It takes about half an hour to cross the lake to Hakone-machi (also called simply Hakone; *machi* means city) and Moto-Hakone, two resort towns right next to each other on the southern edge of the lake. This end of the lake affords the best view of Mount Fuji, one often depicted in tourist publications. Boats are in operation all year (though they run less frequently in winter and not at all in stormy weather); the last boat departs around 5pm from the end of March to the end of November. There are also buses that connect Togendai with Moto-Hakone, Odawara, and Shinjuku.

If you're heading back to Tokyo, buses depart for Odawara near the boat piers in both Hakone-machi and Moto-Hakone. Otherwise, for more sightseeing, get off the boat in Hakone-machi, turn left, and walk about 5 minutes on the town's main road, following the signs and turning left to the **Hakone Check Point (Hakone Seki-sho)** ★ (☎ 0460/3-6635), on a road lined with souvenir shops. This is a reconstructed guardhouse originally built in 1619 to serve as a check-point along the famous Tokaido Highway, which connected Edo (present-day

Tokyo) with Kyoto. In feudal days, local lords, called *daimyo*, were required to spend alternate years in Edo; their wives were kept on in Edo as virtual hostages to discourage the lords from planning rebellions while in their homelands. This was one of several points along the highway to guard against the transport of guns, spies, and female travelers trying to flee Edo. Passes were necessary for travel, and although it was possible to sneak around it, male violators who were caught were promptly executed, while women suffered the indignity of having their heads shaved and then being given away to anyone who wanted them. Inside the reconstructed guardhouse, you'll see life-size models re-enacting scenes inside a checkpoint. Your ticket also allows admission to a small museum with displays relating to the Edo Period, including items used for travel, samurai armor, and gruesome articles of torture. Open daily from 9am to 5pm (until 4:30pm in winter); admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults and ¥150 (\$1.25) for children. It shouldn't take more than 30 minutes to see everything.

Just beyond the Hakone Check Point, at the big parking lot with the traditional gate, is the **Hakone Detached Palace Garden (Onshi-Hakone-Koen)**, which lies on a small promontory on Lake Ashi and has spectacular views of the lake and, sometimes, Mount Fuji. Originally part of an imperial summer villa built in 1886, the garden is open free to the public 24 hours daily. It's a great place for wandering. On its grounds is the **Lakeside Observation Building** (open daily 9am–4:30pm) with displays relating to the Hakone Palace, which was destroyed by earthquakes.

If you take the northernmost exit from the garden, crossing a bridge, you'll see the neighboring resort town, **Moto-Hakone**. Across the highway and lined with ancient and mighty cedars is part of the old **Tokaido Highway** itself. During the Edo Period, more than 400 cedars were planted along this important road, which today stretches 2.4m (1½ miles) along the curve of Lake Ashi and makes for a pleasant stroll (unfortunately, though, a modern road has been built right beside the original one). Moto-Hakone is a 5-minute walk from the Detached Palace Garden.

In Moto-Hakone, the **Narukawa Art Museum** (★ ★ (C) 0460/3-6828) is very worthwhile. Just after you enter town, go up the hill to the right to the orange torii gate. It specializes in modern works of the *Nihonga* style of painting, developed during the Heian period (794–1185), which is sparser than Western paintings (which tend to fill in backgrounds and every inch of canvas). Large paintings and screens by contemporary Nihonga artists are on display, including works by Yamamoto Kyujin, Maki Susumu, Kayama Matazo, Hirayama Ikuo, and Hori Fumiko. Changing exhibitions feature younger up-and-coming artists, as well as glassware. I wouldn't miss it; views of Lake Ashi and Mount Fuji are a bonus. Open daily 9am to 5pm; admission is ¥1,200 (\$10) for adults and ¥600 (\$5) for children.

WHEN YOU'RE DONE SIGHTSEEING FOR THE DAY Buses depart for Hakone Yumoto and Odawara from both Hakone-machi and Moto-Hakone two to four times an hour. Be sure to check the time of the last departure; generally, it's around 8pm, but this can change with the season and the day of the week. (The bus also passes two of the accommodations recommended below, the Fujiya Hotel and Ichinoyu, as well as Yunessun hot-spring baths; another bus will take you to Fuji-Hakone Guest House.) Otherwise, the trip from Moto-Hakone takes approximately 30 minutes to Hakone Yumoto, where you can catch the Romance Car bound for Shinjuku, or 50 minutes to Odawara, where

you can then catch the Odakyu express train or Romance Car back to Shinjuku or the Shinkansen back to Tokyo Station.

WHERE TO STAY

Ashinoko Camp Mura *Kids* Since you're in a national park, you might be inclined to enjoy nature by roughing it in a cabin beside Lake Ashi, just a 10-minute walk from the ropeway to Sounzan and boat to Hakone-machi. Operated by Kanagawa Prefecture and also with tent camping, it offers row and detached (more expensive and closer to the lake) cabins that sleep up to six persons, each with two bedrooms, a bathroom, a living room with cooking facilities and tableware, and a deck with picnic table. However, there is no supermarket in nearby Togendai, so you'll either want to bring your own food or dine on Japanese breakfast and dinner in the camp restaurant (reservations required). There's a hiking trail around the lake. It's a great place for kids.

164 Hakone-machi, Moto-Hakone, Ashigarashimo-gun, Kanagawa 250-0522. © 0460/4-8279. Fax 0460/4-6489. 36 units. Peak season ¥26,250 (\$218) row cabin, ¥31,500 (\$262) detached cabin. Off season ¥15,750 (\$131) row cabin, ¥21,000 (\$175) detached cabin. No credit cards. Bus: Togendai, from Odawara (1 hr.) or Shinjuku (2 hr.), then a 10-min. walk. **Amenities:** Restaurant; rental bikes; barbecue grills. *In room:* Kitchenette, fridge.

Fuji-Hakone Guest House It's a bit isolated, but this Japanese Inn Group member offers inexpensive, spotlessly clean lodging in tatami rooms, all nonsmoking. A newer house, situated in tranquil surroundings set back from a tree-shaded road, is run by a man who speaks very good English and is happy to provide sightseeing information, including a map of the area with local restaurants. Some of the rooms face the Hakone mountain range. Pluses are the communal lounge area with TV and even a piano and guitar and the outdoor hot-spring bath (for which there's an extra ¥500/\$4.15 charge).

912 Sengokuhara, Hakone, Kanagawa 250-0631. © 0460/4-6577. Fax 0460/4-6578. www.fujihakone.com. 14 units (none with bathroom). ¥5,000–¥6,000 (\$42–\$50) single; ¥10,000–¥12,000 (\$83–\$100) double; ¥15,000–¥16,000 (\$125–\$133) triple. Plus ¥150 (\$1.25) local tax per person. Peak season and weekends ¥1,000–¥2,000 (\$8.35–\$17) extra. Minimum 2-night stay preferred. Western breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra. AE, MC, V. Bus: Hakone Tozan (included in the Hakone Free Pass) from Togendai (15 min.) or from Odawara Station (50 min.) to the Senkyoro-mae stop (announced in English), then a 1-min. walk. **Amenities:** Hot-spring bath; coin-op laundry and dryer; communal fridge and microwave. *In room:* A/C, TV.

The Fujiya Hotel *★★★ Finds* The Fujiya, which was established in 1878, is quite simply the grandest, most majestic old hotel in Hakone; indeed, it might be the loveliest historic hotel in Japan. I love this hotel for its comfortably old-fashioned atmosphere, including such Asian touches as a Japanese-style roof, lots of windows, and long wooden corridors with photographs of famous guests. Staying here transports you to a gentler, and more genteel, past. There are five separate buildings, all different and added on at various times in the hotel's long history, but management has been meticulous in retaining its historic traditions. A landscaped garden out back, with a waterfall, a pond, a greenhouse, and stunning views over the valley, is great for strolls and meditation. An outdoor pool, fed by river water, occupies a corner of the garden, and there's also an indoor thermal pool and hot-spring public baths. Even the private bathroom in each unit has piped-in hot-spring water.

Except for rooms in the Forest Lodge (built in 1960 and rather ordinary), rooms are old-fashioned and spacious with high ceilings and antique furnishings; some even have claw-foot tubs. The most expensive rooms are the largest, but my favorites are those in the Flower Palace, which has an architectural style that reminds me of a Japanese temple and seems unchanged since its 1936 construction. Even if you don't stay here, do come for a meal or tea. Highly recommended.

Note: The special rate for foreigners, below, is higher on weekends and is not available during Golden Week, the month of August, or New Year's; if you want to stay in the Flower Palace, you'll pay \$30 extra.

359 Miyanoshita, Hakone-machi, Ashigarashimo-gun 250-0404. ☎ 0460/2-2211. Fax 0460/2-2210. www.fujiyahotel.co.jp. 146 units. Special foreigners' rate \$125 single or double, \$50 extra Sat or night before holiday. Regular rates ¥18,000–¥25,000 (\$150–\$208) single or double, ¥5,000 (\$42) extra on Sat or night before holiday, ¥10,000 (\$83) extra mid-Aug and New Year's. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Miyanoshita, Hakone Tozan Railway (5 min.). Bus: From Odawara or Moto-Hakone to Miyanoshita Onsen stop (1 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (see "Where to Dine," below); bar; indoor and outdoor pools (free for hotel guests); golf course; hot-spring baths; Jacuzzi; sauna; landscaped garden; game room; souvenir shops; room service (9am–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hair dryer.

④6 **Ichinoyu** ★★ Located near Tonosawa Station (on the Hakone Tozan Line) next to a roaring river, this delightful, rambling wooden building stands on a tree-shaded winding road that follows the track of the old Tokaido Highway. First opened more than 370 years ago, Ichinoyu is now in its 15th generation of owners. It claims to be the oldest ryokan in the area and was once honored by the visit of a shogun during the Edo Period. Old artwork, wall hangings, and paintings decorate the place.

The ryokan has only tatami rooms. The oldest date from the Meiji Period, more than 100 years ago. My favorite is the Take, old-fashioned and consisting mainly of seasoned and weathered wood; it faces the river and even has its own private outdoor bath, also with views of the river. Ditto for the Kotobuki room (rooms with private *rotenburo*, or outdoor hot-spring bath, cost ¥5,000/\$42 extra). Both the communal tubs and the tubs in the units have hot water supplied from a natural spring. The price you pay depends on your room, the meals you select, and the time of year.

90 Tonosawa, Hakone-machi, Ashigarashimo-gun 250-0315. ☎ 0460/5-5331. Fax 0460/5-5335. www.ichinoyu.co.jp. 24 units (12 with bathroom). ¥8,800–¥14,800 (\$73–\$123) per person including 2 meals. ¥3,000 (\$25) extra per person in Aug and on Sat and holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Tonosawa, Hakone Tozan Railway (6 min.). Bus: From Odawara or Moto-Hakone to Tonosawa bus stop (2 min.). **Amenities:** Indoor and outdoor hot-spring baths. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

For casual dining while sightseeing, the Hakone Open-Air Museum has a pleasant cafe overlooking the park's fantastic scenery. Also sporting a view is the even less formal restaurant at the Owakudani Ropeway Station, serving spaghetti, curry rice, noodles, and other inexpensive fare.

Main Dining Room ★★ **CONTINENTAL** The Fujiya Hotel, Hakone's grandest, oldest hotel, conveniently located near a stop on the two-car Hakone Tozan Railway, is a memorable place for a good Western meal. The main dining hall, dating from 1930, is very bright and cheerful with a high and intricately detailed ceiling, large windows with Japanese screens, a wooden floor, and white tablecloths. The views of the Hakone hills are impressive, and the service by the bow-tied waitstaff is attentive. For lunch you can have such dishes as spaghetti, sandwiches, fried chicken, rainbow trout, and sirloin steak. The excellent diners feature elaborate set courses or a la carte dishes ranging from scallops and sole to grilled lamb, chicken, rainbow trout, and steak. Afterward, be sure to tour the landscaped garden.

In the Fujiya Hotel, 359 Miyanoshita. ☎ 0460/2-2211. Reservations required for dinner. Main dishes ¥2,200–¥6,800 (\$18–\$57); set dinners ¥10,000–¥15,000 (\$83–\$125); lunch main dishes ¥1,500–¥5,800 (\$13–\$48). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–2pm and 6–8:30pm. Station: Miyanoshita on the Hakone Tozan Railway (5 min.).

6 Izu Peninsula, Tokyo's Playground

Atami: 107km (66 miles) SW of Tokyo; Ito: 120km (75 miles) SW of Tokyo

Whenever Tokyoites want to spend a night or two at a hot-spring spa on the seashore, they head for Izu Peninsula. Jutting into the Pacific Ocean southwest of Tokyo, Izu boasts some fine beaches, verdant and lush countryside, and a dramatic coastline marked in spots by high cliffs and tumbling surf. Even though the scenery is at times breathtaking, there's little of historical interest to lure a short-term visitor to Japan; make sure you've seen both Kamakura and Nikko before you consider coming here. Keep in mind also that Izu's resorts are terribly crowded during the summer vacation period from mid-July to the end of August.

The best way to enjoy Izu Peninsula, which is in Shizuoka Prefecture, is to drive, making this one of the few times when it may be worthwhile to rent your own car. A road hugs the coast all the way around the peninsula; you can drive it easily in a day (but beware: it's awfully narrow in parts). Rather than rent a car in Tokyo, I suggest you wait until you reach Atami or Ito, both of which have many car-rental agencies near their train stations. Ito, especially, warrants a car because attractions are rather far-flung and poorly served by public transportation.

If you're traveling during the peak summer season (July–Aug), you should make accommodations reservations at least several months in advance. Otherwise, there are hotel, ryokan, and minshuku reservation offices in all of Izu's resort towns that will arrange accommodations for you. Be aware, however, that if a place has a room still open at the last minute in August, there's probably a reason for it—poor location, poor service, or unimaginative decor.

Before you leave Tokyo, be sure to pick up the leaflet “The Izu Peninsula” at the Tourist Information Center.

ATAMI

Atami means “hot sea.” According to legend, once upon a time local fishermen, concerned about a geyser spewing forth into the sea and killing lots of fish and marine life, asked a Buddhist monk to intervene on their behalf and to pray for a solution to the problem. The prayers paid off when the geyser moved itself to the beach; not only was the marine life spared, but Atami was blessed with hot-spring water the townspeople could henceforth bathe in.

Today, Atami—with a population of 44,000—is a conglomeration of hotels, ryokan, restaurants, pachinko parlors, souvenir shops, and a sizable red-light district, spread along narrow, winding streets that hug steep mountain slopes around Atami Bay. The city itself isn't very interesting—in fact, its economy is severely depressed, and since it has none of the fancy shops and nightlife to attract a younger generation, mostly older Japanese vacation here, giving the town an old-fashioned, unpretentious atmosphere. In any case, this is the most easily accessible hot-spring resort from Tokyo, and it has a wide beach flanked by a half-mile boardwalk and a wonderful art museum that even Tokyoites make a day trip to see.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Tokyo Station, it's 55 minutes by **Shinkansen bullet train**; since not all bullet trains stop in Atami, be sure to check beforehand. If you don't have a Japan Rail Pass, the fare is ¥3,570 (\$30) for an unreserved seat. You can also take the slower, 2-hour **JR Tokaido Local Line** for ¥1,890 (\$16).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **JR Travel Service Center** (adjacent to a coffee shop) is to the left as you exit the train station (☎ 0557/81-6002; open

daily 10am–1:30pm and 2:50–5:30pm). No English is spoken, but English literature and a map are available.

GETTING AROUND Buses serve major sightseeing attractions in Atami. If you're spending the day here, you might wish to purchase a 1-day ticket for the **YuYu Bus**, which has two routes, both making circuitous trips through town and departing Atami Station every 30 minutes. You can leave and reboard as often as you wish, or you can stay on for a tour of the city. The cost is ¥800 (\$6.65) for adults and ¥400 (\$3.35) for children. There's also a **Toyota Rental Car** office in front of Atami Station (☎ 0557/81-0100), open daily 8am to 8pm.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Atami's must-see is the **MOA Art Museum** ★, 26–2 Momoyama-cho (☎ 0557/84-2511), housed in a modern building atop a hill with sweeping views of Atami and the bay. It's a 5-minute bus ride from Atami Station on the YuYu Bus; or take a bus from platform 4 to the last stop (one-way fare is ¥160/\$1.35). The museum's entrance is dramatic—a long escalator ride through a tunnel followed by a 7-minute laser show (given every hour). The museum itself, however, concentrates on traditional Asian art, including woodblock prints by Hokusai, Hiroshige, and their contemporaries; Chinese ceramics; Japanese bronze religious art; and lacquerware. Although some 200 items from the 3,500-piece private collection are changed monthly, look for two National Treasures almost always on display: a tea-storage jar with a wisteria design by Edo artist Ninsei, and a gold-leaf screen of red and white plum blossoms by Ogata Korin. It takes about an hour to tour the museum, open Friday through Wednesday from 9:30am to 5pm; admission is ¥1,600 (\$13) for adults, ¥1,200 (\$10) for seniors, ¥800 (\$6.65) for university and high-school students, and free for children.

Another worthwhile attraction is (47) **Kiunkaku**, 4–2 Showa-cho (☎ 0557/86-3101; YuYu Bus: Kiunkaku stop), built in 1918 as the private villa of a ship-ping magnate, converted to a ryokan in 1947, and now open to the public. It's an eclectic mix of Japanese and Western architectural styles, with stained-glass windows, fireplaces, parquet floors, gaily painted European furniture, and tatami rooms, wrapped around a lovely inner garden. It was once a favorite haunt of famous Japanese writers (including Mishima Yukio); who wouldn't feel inspired here? Allow 30 minutes to tour the facilities, open Thursday to Tuesday from 9am to 5pm. Admission is ¥310 (\$2.60) for adults, ¥210 (\$1.75) for university and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children.

Finally, if you're here on a weekend, try to catch the 11am dancing performance of the **Atami Geisha**, in front of City Hall at Geigi Kenban, 17–13 Chuo-cho (☎ 0557/81-3575; YuYu Bus: Shiyakusho-mae). Admission, including tea and refreshments, is ¥1,300 (\$11).

WHERE TO STAY

(48) **Taikanso** ★★ Located on a pine-shaded mountain slope above the city, this beautiful ryokan was built in 1938 as the private villa of a steelworks owner and was named after his friend Yokoyama Taikan, a famous Japanese painter. Ten years later it was converted to a Japanese inn; since then, it's been expanded into several buildings connected by covered pathways and meandering streams, adhering to a Kyoto style of architecture popular in the 16th century. Various styles of rooms are available (most with washlet toilets and massage chairs), with the most expensive offering the best views, the most space, and the best meals (Western-style breakfasts available on request). The ultimate in luxury is the oldest unit, a three-room suite with a sitting alcove and cypress tub. Queen Beatrix

of the Netherlands stayed here with her husband and three sons. Although all the rooms boast hot-spring water for the tubs, there are three public baths with open-air bathing. Be sure to wander the corridors and grounds.

7-1 Hayashigaoka-cho, Atami City, Shizuoka 413-0031. ☎ 0557/81-8137. Fax 0557/83-5308. www.atami-taikanso.com. 44 units. ¥28,000–¥70,000 (\$233–\$583) per person. Rates include 2 meals and a service charge. AE, DC, V. Take a taxi from Atami Station, a 4-min. ride. **Amenities:** Sushi bar; coffee shop; nightclub with live band; outdoor swimming pool (free for hotel guests); indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; sauna; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

WHERE TO DINE

④9 **Home Run Sushi** *Value* SUSHI For excellent sushi, head to this simple, one-room restaurant near the waterfront with both counter and table seating. There's no English-language menu, but pictures show various kinds of sushi a la carte and the incredibly cheap weekday set lunches. My ¥680 (\$5.65) meal included several kinds of sushi, soup, and salad. I have no idea why this place is called Home Run—one of Japan's many mysteries.

5-1 Nagisacho. ☎ 0557/82-7300. Sashimi or sushi set meals ¥1,000–¥2,000 (\$8.35–\$17); set lunches ¥400–¥880 (\$3.35–\$7.35); sushi a la carte ¥200–¥300 (\$1.65–\$2.50). No credit cards. Open daily 11:30am–11pm. A 13-min. walk from Atami Station, at the end of Ginza Dori street on a corner to the left.

ITO

Just 18km (11 miles) south of Atami, Ito is a hot-spring spa, hemmed in on one side by steeply wooded mountains and on the other by the sea. Its 75,000 inhab-

itants are unusually spread along the coast in a string of hamlets, separated by beautiful scenery but connected by winding roads, private railway, and buses. Its lush, tropical atmosphere with palm trees and flowering bushes comes as a surprise this close to Tokyo, but what makes this town truly unique is that it supports an astonishing num-

Fun Fact **Ito's Restrooms**

Ito is very proud of its public restrooms dotting the city, each in a different architectural style. Check them out!

ber of private museums, most of them Western and some quite odd. I don't think I could come up with a more bizarre collection of museums even if I tried.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Tokyo Station it's approximately 1 hour and 45 minutes to Ito Station aboard the **JR Odoriko** (¥4,090/\$34); or 1 hour and 20 minutes aboard the **Super View Odoriko JR** (¥4,390/\$37), with five daily runs. Otherwise, a slower local line takes approximately 2½ hours and costs ¥2,210 (\$18) one-way. From Atami, the trip costs ¥320 (\$2.65) and takes almost a half-hour aboard the **JR Ito Local Line**.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Ito Tourist Information Office** (☎ 0557/37-6105) has two locations: across the street from the train station's exit (open daily 9am–5pm) and in Marine Town on the waterfront (open daily 10am–5:30pm).

GETTING AROUND The Ito Local Line travels south from Ito Station to **Jogasaki**, the site of Izu's famous Jogasaki Coast. However, since most museums are located inland from Jogasaki, it's best to rent a car (avoid weekends and peak season). There are many agencies around Ito Station, including **Toyota Rental Car** (☎ 0557/37-0100), **JR Eki Rent-A-Car** (☎ 0557/37-2866), and **Avis** (☎ 0557/36-1150). Otherwise, a **bus** departing Ito Station for Shaboten Koen

makes stops at both the Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art and the Izu Glass & Craft Museum. A **Free Pass** for ¥1,300 (\$11) allows unlimited 1-day travel by bus.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Of Ito's two dozen museums, the most well known, and one of the oldest, is the **Ikeda Museum of 20th Century Art** ★★, 614 Totari (☎ 0557/45-2211; bus stop: Ikeda Nijuseki Bijutsukan). Though small, it boasts an impressive collection by both Western and Japanese artists, including Warhol, Salvador Dalí, Picasso, Renoir, Roy Lichtenstein, Edvard Munch, Emil Nolde, Willem de Kooning, Miró, Kokoshka, Matisse, and Chagall as well as Kimura Issho, Tatsuoki Nambata, and Junzo Watanabe. Plan on spending about 40 minutes here. Open Thursday to Tuesday 10am to 5pm; admission is ¥900 (\$7.50) for adults, ¥700 (\$5.85) for university and high-school students, and ¥500 (\$4.15) for elementary and junior-high students.

Another personal favorite is the **Izu Glass & Craft Museum** ★, 11-300 Omurokogen (☎ 0557/51-7222; bus stop: Risokyo), with its exquisite collection of Art Nouveau and Art Deco glass art, including figurines, perfume bottles, jewelry, vases, and lamps by such artists as Galle, Lalique, Erté, and Daum. Although at first thought it seems strange to find such a collection here, the use of dragonflies, water lilies, orchids, and other motifs show decided Japanese influence. You'll want to spend at least an hour here. Open 9am to 5pm daily; admission is ¥850 (\$7.75) for adults and ¥450 (\$3.75) for children.

Other art and decorative-art museums include the **Izu Lake Ippeki Museum** with works by Jean-Pierre Cassaigneul (☎ 0557/45-5500), the **Izu Kogen Ceramic Glass Art Museum** (☎ 0557/54-9600) with Chinese works, the **Izu Lake Ippeki Museum of Perfume** (☎ 0557/45-7700) with early-20th-century American and European perfume bottles, the **Brian Wild Smith Museum** (☎ 0557/51-7330) with original pictures and books including *Mother Goose*, the **Bohemian Glass Museum** (☎ 0557/53-4630), and the **Antique Jewelry Museum** (☎ 0557/54-5566) with Victorian brooches, rings, and more. There are also special-interest museums with collections dedicated to Santa, the Teddy bear, dolls, music boxes and automatic musical instruments, stained glass, antique clocks, ammonites, cats, and even penguins. A wax museum boasts likenesses of Elvis, the Beatles, Charlie Chaplin, Michael Jackson, presidents Lincoln and Clinton, and other celebrities. Contact the **Ito Tourist Office** for more information.

To see the **Jogasaki Coast** with its dramatic, rugged, cliff-lined coast and hiking paths, take the train to Jogasaki Station; from there it's a 20-minute walk. For bathing, there's the **Ito Orange Beach** not far from Ito Station.

HOT-SPRING BATHING

Although many accommodations boast hot-spring baths, Japanese think nothing of visiting additional hot-spring facilities during the day. Unique is ⑤① **Tokaikan**, 12-10 Higashimatsubara-cho (☎ 0557/36-2004), located next to Ryokan Inaba (see below). A beautiful Japanese inn built in 1928 and boasting superior wood craftsmanship, it was in danger of becoming a parking lot before it was rescued by the city and opened to the public. You can wander its halls for free, but taking the waters in the tiny public baths costs ¥500 (\$4.15). It's open daily 9am to 9pm; closed the third Tuesday of every month.

Seaside Spa, located in a small, waterfront shopping/dining complex called Marine Town, 571-19 Yukawa (☎ 0557/38-1811), offers indoor and outdoor

baths with views of the sea, whirlpools, and saunas daily from 10am to 10pm; admission is ¥1,500 (\$13). It's about a 25-minute walk from Ito Station; turn left out of the station and left again at the coast.

WHERE TO STAY

(51) Ito-en Hotel *Value* Located on the Matsukawa River, this modern, simple hotel opened in 2002 and offers mostly Japanese-style rooms that can sleep two to six people, all with small balconies and—an intriguing touch—*manga* comic books. There are also huge Western-style twin rooms and combination bed/tatami rooms that are great for families. Other pluses include its hot-spring indoor/outdoor baths and breakfast served until a late 11am. The downside: Only parties of two or more are accepted.

1–12 Matsukawa, Ito City, Shizuoka 414-0001 ☎ **0557/35-1234**. Fax 0557/35-2003. 66 units. ¥7,600 (\$58) per person. Rates include 2 buffet meals. AE, MC, V. Station: Ito (8 min.). Go straight out of the station to the 3rd stoplight, and turn right on the last street before the river; it's on the left. **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; sauna; lobby computer with free Internet access. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, safe, washlet toilet.

Kawana Hotel *★★* This grand old hotel is a good choice for relaxation, golf, and swimming. With its whitewashed walls, red roof tiles, and manicured lawns sloping gently toward the sea, the place seems little changed since it opened in 1936. Even the lobby lounge, built in the theme of an English country estate, remains faithful to the era with its soaring ceiling, large fireplace, coat of arms, heavy wood detailing, and antique furniture. The hotel's seclusion drew Joe Dimaggio and Marilyn Monroe on their honeymoon. Today, its two 18-hole golf courses make it famous among golfers—the hotel is often fully booked a half year in advance. Nevertheless, the hotel shows its age in places, with unimaginative, mediocre rooms that could use some updating. Best are those facing the sea, with small balconies, automatic curtain controls, and large bathrooms, most with two sinks. The least expensive rooms are smaller in size and face inland toward the mountains; double rooms are cramped for two large people. Don't forget to climb to the top of the hotel's observation tower for a view of the grounds and their 10,000 cherry trees. Since the hotel is rather isolated, you'll probably want to dine at one of its restaurants: the old-fashioned main dining room serving Continental cuisine; a 370-year-old, thatched-roof farmhouse specializing in Japanese food; and the casual, oval-shaped Sun Parlor with windows on three sides that offer views of the sea and, on clear days, Mount Fuji rising above the mountains.

1459 Kawana, Ito City, Shizuoka 414-0044. ☎ **0557/45-1111**. Fax 0557/45-3834. 140 units. ¥25,000–¥29,000 (\$208–\$242) single; ¥32,000–¥36,000 (\$267–\$300) double; ¥28,000–¥50,000 (\$233–\$417) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. A 15-min. taxi ride from Ito Station. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Continental, Japanese, casual); 3 outdoor swimming pools, including a children's pool (fee: ¥1,600/\$13); 2 18-hole golf courses (greens fees: ¥13,000–¥16,000/\$108–\$133 weekdays, ¥20,000–¥23,000/\$167–\$192 weekends and holidays); unlit outdoor tennis courts; in-room massage; room service (8–10am and 3–10:30pm); laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, minibar, hair dryer.

(52) Ryokan Inaba *★★★ Finds* This 85-year-old traditional ryokan, a registered National Treasure under the kind guidance of English-speaking Mrs. Inaba, has a lovely spot on the Matsukawa River not far from Ito Orange Beach. Each room is different (even a different kind of wood is employed in each room), with such traditional touches as sitting balconies over the river or wood carvings adorning windows, transoms, or shoji screens. All rooms boast river views (making this the best place for viewing the annual tub race held here the first Sun in July or the riverside Noh theater in May). Across the river is a tiny,

chest-deep, hot spring-fed pool, open only to inn guests (May–Nov). Meals are served either in your room or in a communal dining room facing the river, according to your preference (vegetarian meals available). Photo op: The best view of the ryokan is from across the river.

12–13 Higashimatsubara-cho, Ito City, Shizuoka 414-0022. ☎ 0557/37-3178. Fax 0557/37-3180. inaba-r@mtd.biglobe.ne.jp. 16 units (2 with bathroom, 8 with toilet only). Peak season, Sat, and holidays ¥15,000–¥25,000 (\$125–\$208) per person; off season and Sun–Fri ¥13,000–¥20,000 (\$108–\$167) per person. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. MC, V. Station: Ito (10 min.). Go straight out of the station to the 3rd stop-light (just before the bridge) and turn left; keep to the right on the small lane that parallels the river; it will be on the right. **Amenities:** 24-hr. hot-spring public baths; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

⑤③ **Fujiichi FISH** This family-owned establishment near the public fish market and marina operates a fish shop on the ground floor and a simple restaurant on the second floor with views of the small Ito harbor. Popular with the locals, it also attracts tourists who have heard about its reputation for fresh fish. The *teishoku* gives a choice of main dish (like grilled fish, tempura, or sashimi) along with rice and soup, while set courses include more side dishes.

7–6 Shizumicho. ☎ 0557/36-7669. Teishoku ¥1,000–¥2,280 (\$8.35–\$19); set courses ¥2,880–¥4,380 (\$24–\$37); *donburi* rice casseroles ¥1,200–¥2,500 (\$10–\$21). MC, V. Mon–Fri 10am–3pm; Sat–Sun 10am–7pm (last order). Closed holidays and 4th Wed of every month. Station: Ito (20 min.). Turn left out of the station, walk to the coast, and turn right. After you cross the bridge, it will be on the right across from Denny's.

The Japan Alps

The several volcanic mountain ranges that lie in central Honshu together comprise **Japan Alps National Park** ★★ (called Chubu Sangaku National Park in Japanese). With the exception of Japan's tallest mountain, Mount Fuji (see section 4 of chapter 5, beginning on p. 244), all of Japan's loftiest mountains are in these ranges, making the Japan Alps a popular destination for hikers in summer and skiers in winter (Nagano, near Matsumoto, hosted the XVIII Winter Olympics in 1998). In addition, since some of the villages nestled in these mountains retain much of their traditional architecture, the Japan Alps provide a unique look at mountain life both past and present.

A GOOD STRATEGY FOR SEEING THE JAPAN ALPS Because towns

and villages in this region are spread out—with lots of mountains in between—traveling isn't as fast in this part of the country as on Honshu's broad plains. Your best strategy for visiting all the destinations covered in this chapter is to start from Nagoya Station by taking the JR Shinano train in the morning to Nakatsugawa, where you can then board a bus for Magome and spend the day hiking to Tsumago. From Tsumago, it's only a short bus ride to Nagiso, where you can then reboard the Shinano train bound for Matsumoto. From Matsumoto, you'll travel by bus onward to Takayama and then on to Ogimachi (in Shirakawago).

See “Suggested Itineraries for Seeing Japan,” in chapter 2 for more information on sightseeing routes through the Japan Alps.

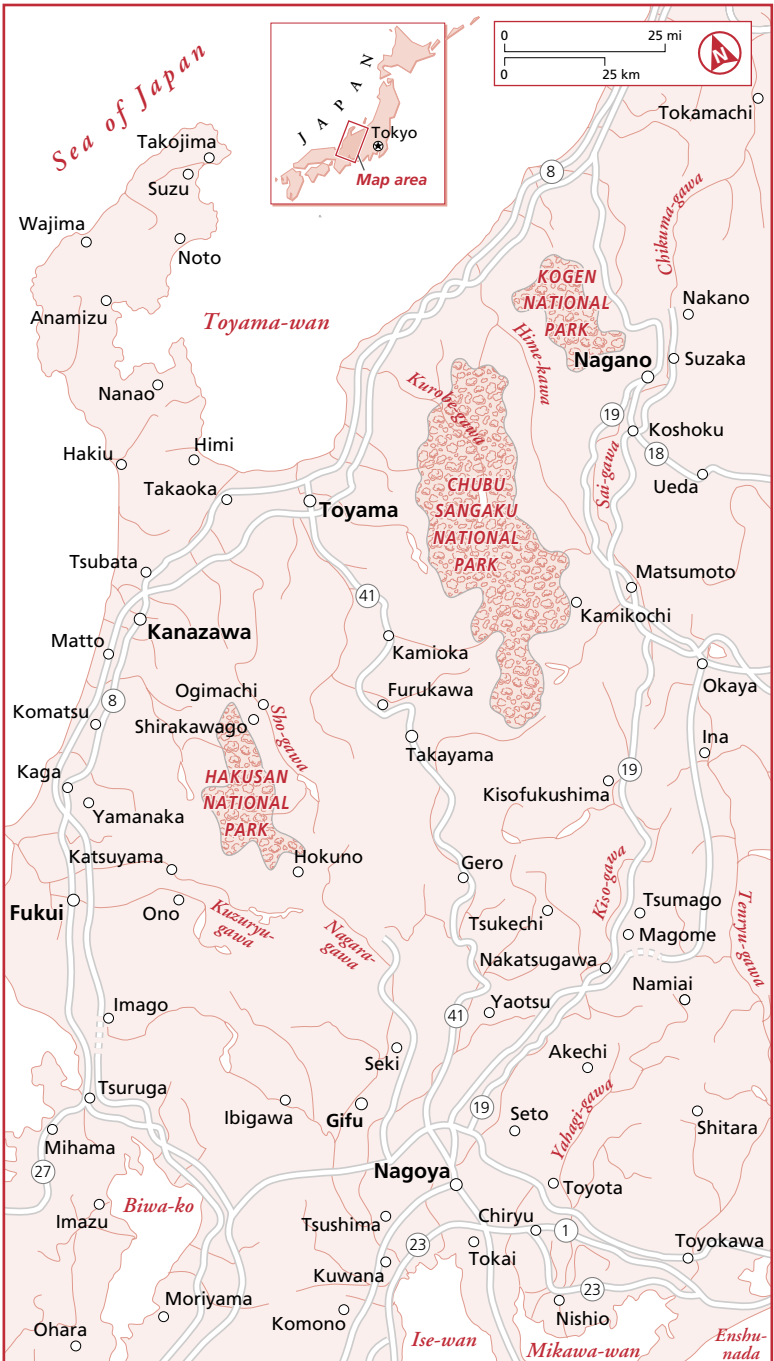
1 Matsumoto, Gateway to the Japan Alps ★

235km (146 miles) NW of Tokyo

Located in the middle of a wide basin about 198m (660 ft.) above sea level and surrounded on all sides by mountain ranges, **Matsumoto** ★ boasts a fine feudal castle with the oldest existing *donjon* (keep) in Japan, as well as an outstanding woodblock-print museum. Although the city itself (pop. 202,000) is modern with little remaining from its castle days, it does boast approximately 100 *kura* (storehouses) scattered throughout town, built a century ago after a devastating fire destroyed most homes and businesses. Some of the *kura*, made of earth and straw and then painted many times to protect valuables against future flames, have been renovated into shops, restaurants, and other establishments.

In any event, I find Matsumoto pleasant, the air fresh, and its people among the nicest I've encountered in Japan. Encircled by towering peaks, sparkling mountain lakes, and colorful wildflowers, Matsumoto also serves as the gateway to the hiking trails of Japan Alps National Park; most travelers heading to the more remote regions of the Japan Alps pass through here on their way.

The Japan Alps



ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The **JR Chuo Honsen Line** runs directly to Matsumoto from Tokyo's Shinjuku Station. Its *Limited Express Azusa*, departing every hour or less, reaches Matsumoto in about 2½ to 3½ hours and costs ¥6,200 (\$52) one-way for an unreserved seat. There's also a direct JR train from Nagoya, the *Limited Express Shinano*, which takes about 2 hours and costs ¥5,360 (\$45).

By Bus From Tokyo's Shinjuku Station, buses depart for Matsumoto approximately every hour, taking about 3¼ hours and costing ¥3,400 (\$28). From Nagoya, the ride is 2½-hours and ¥3,460 (\$29); from Osaka, the ride is 5½ hours and ¥5,710 (\$48); from Takayama, the ride is 2¼ hours and ¥3,100 (\$26).

VISITOR INFORMATION Before you depart from Tokyo, pick up a sheet called "Nagano" at the **Tourist Information Center** (p. 100). It provides information on buses and trains to Matsumoto, as well as information on sights in and around Matsumoto. It also recommends 2- to 4-hour hiking trips from **Kamikochi** ★, the Japan Alps' most popular destination for serious hikers; the small village is a little more than 2 hours from Matsumoto via train and then bus.

In Matsumoto, you'll find the **Matsumoto Tourist Information** window (☎ 0263/32-2814; www.city.matsumoto.nagano.jp; open daily 9:30am–6pm Apr–Oct, to 5:30pm Nov–Mar) by taking the main (east) exit out of Matsumoto Station and turning right. It has a good map of the city in English, and its excellent English-speaking staff will also help with accommodations and can provide information on nearby skiing destinations.

GETTING AROUND You can **walk** to Matsumoto Castle, about a mile northeast of the station, in about 20 minutes. Alternatively, the Town Sneaker Bus departs from in front of Matsumoto Station every 30 minutes and makes a circular trip to all city sights; it costs ¥100 (85¢) each time you get off. To visit the Japan Ukiyo-e Museum, however, you'll have to go by **train** or **taxi**. Alternatively, free bicycles are available daily 8:30am to 5pm at various locations throughout town, including the Matsumoto City Museum next to Matsumoto Castle and the Kaichi Gakko Primary School. They're convenient for visiting sights not accessible by Sneaker Bus; ask the Matsumoto Tourist Information staff for details. Otherwise, you can rent a **bike** from JR Eki Rent-A-Car beside the station for ¥1,500 (\$13) per day.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

In addition to the sights below, good places for strolling and shopping include the **Nakamachi** district in the heart of the city with its kura, restaurants, and shops selling Matsumoto furniture, crafts, and antiques; and **Nawate Dori**, a narrow pedestrian lane flanking the Metoba River where vendors sell fruit, vegetables, flowers, and crafts.

Unless otherwise noted, all directions below are from Matsumoto Station.

MATSUMOTO CASTLE & ENVIRONS

Matsumoto Castle ★★ Originally built in 1504 when Japan was in the throes of continuing and bloody civil wars, Matsumoto Castle is a fine specimen of a feudal castle with a 400-year-old donjon that's the oldest existing keep in the country. Surrounded by a moat with ducks and white swans and lined with willow and cherry trees, the outside walls of the donjon are black, earning the place the nickname of Karasu-jo, or Crow Castle. It's rather small as castles go, but English-speaking Goodwill Guides stand ready daily to provide free, 1-hour

tours outlining the castle's history and architectural features. Take your shoes off at the entrance and walk in stocking feet over worn wooden floors and up steep and narrow steps until you finally reach the sixth floor, from which you have a nice view of the city. This would have served as the *daimyo*'s (feudal lord's) headquarters in case of enemy attack, while the fifth floor, with views in all directions, was where the generals would have conferred during war. Although the Ishikawa clan rebuilt the castle in 1593 in anticipation of gun warfare (guns were introduced to Japan in 1543) with many arrow and gun slots and walls thick enough to withstand bullets, the castle was never attacked because the civil wars ended with the coming of the Edo Period (1603–1867). Nevertheless, guns were manufactured in Japan throughout the Edo Period, and on display inside the castle are approximately 370 matchlocks, armor, and other arms manufactured in Japan from 1543 to the late Edo era, providing interesting insight into how the import was adapted for domestic use. With war no longer a threat, a moon-viewing room was added to the castle in 1635.

Included in your castle ticket is admission to the **Matsumoto City Museum** (formerly Japan Folklore Museum) ★ next to the castle. This rather eclectic museum has displays relating to archaeology, history, and folklore of the surrounding region, including samurai armor, an ornate palanquin, farming equipment, and items relating to Matsumoto's many festivals. Among these are the summer Tanabata Festival and a fertility festival held in September featuring, well, phalluses. You can tour both castle and museum in about 75 minutes.

4–1 Marunouchi. ㊦ 0263/32-2902. Admission ¥520 (\$4.35) adults, ¥250 (\$2.10) children. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Town Sneaker Bus: Matsumotojo Kuromon. To walk, take Ekimae Dori, the main road leading away from the station, and turn left onto Honmachi Dori.

Kaichi Gakko Primary School Japan's public school system was founded in 1872 (before that, Buddhist temples were the only source of education). In 1876, this handsome white mortar building of black tile topped by an octagonal turret opened its doors, making it one of the oldest Western-style schools still in existence and a fine example of Meiji Era architecture. Serving as an elementary school for 90 years, it remains much as it was, with displays of books, games, desks, abacuses, and other educational items. Most fascinating are the photographs of former pupils (showing how many young girls came to school with young siblings strapped to their backs since parents were hard at work) and the children's books dating from World War II, with offending passages blackened out by demand of Allied occupational forces after the war. You can see everything here in about 30 minutes.

2–4–12 Kaichi. ㊦ 0263/32-5725. Admission ¥310 (\$2.60) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Closed Sun and holidays Dec–Feb. Town Sneaker Bus: Takajomachi. Behind the castle, about a 7-min. walk north.

MORE TO SEE & DO

Japan Ukiyo-e Museum ★★ ★ Finds Don't miss this ultramodern building housing the private collection of the Sakai family, quite simply one of the best museums of woodblock prints in Japan. With more than 100,000 prints, it's believed to be the largest collection of its kind in the world and includes representative masterpieces of all known Ukiyo-e artists. The exhibition changes every 3 months, with approximately 100 prints on display at any one time. A 10-minute slide show with explanations in English introduces the current exhibition, and a pamphlet in English describes the history of the collection and how woodblock prints are made. You'll want to spend at least 45 minutes here, longer if you browse the museum shop of reproduction and original prints.

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide by an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in appendix C showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, the **Matsumoto Folkcraft Museum** (below), refer to no. 54 in appendix C.

2206–1 Koshiba, Shimadachi. © 0263/47-4440. www.ukiyo-e.co.jp. Admission ¥1,000 (\$8.35) adults, half price for children. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. From platform 7, take the local Kamikochi Line 10 min. to Oniwa Station (¥170/\$1.40; JR Rail Pass not accepted) and then walk 15 min. (turn left out of the station, then left at the T-intersection with the post office; after passing under the bridge, take the 3rd right at the small cemetery and continue straight on, past the underpass); or take a ¥1,500 (\$13) taxi ride; or, better yet, come by bike (about 20 min. from Matsumoto Station).

⑤4 **Matsumoto Folkcraft Museum (Matsumoto Mingei-kan)** ★ Here's one more museum worth visiting if you have an extra hour (including the bus ride). Housed in a kura built to store fish, it contains folk art made primarily of wood, glass, bamboo, and porcelain from Japan and other countries, with exhibits changed three times a year. On display may be items as diverse as combs from around the world to Japanese store signs designed during the Edo Period for people who couldn't read. Particularly beautiful are the wooden chests.

1313–1 Satoyama. © 0263/33-1569. Admission ¥210 (\$1.75) adults, ¥100 (85¢) children. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm. About 15 min. by bus (¥290/\$2.40; take the platform 1 bus and get off at the Shimogana Mingeikan Guchi) or taxi.

Matsumoto City Museum of Art (Matsumoto-shi Bijutsukan) Opened in 2002, this inviting museum showcases the talents of artists who have connections to Matsumoto, including Kamijyo Shinzan, who elevated calligraphy to an art, landscape artist Tamura Kazuo, and Kusama Yayoi, a female artist known for her exuberant colors and polka-dot modern art. Expect to spend about 30 minutes here.

4–2–22 Chuo. © 0263/39-7400. Admission ¥800 (\$6.65) adults, ¥500 (\$4.15) university and high-school students, free for children and seniors. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm. Town Sneaker Bus: Matsumoto-shi Bijutsukan or a 15-min. walk east of Matsumoto Station on Ekimae Dori.

⑤5 **Suzuki Shinichi Memorial Hall (Suzuki Shinichi Kinenkan)** ★ If you studied violin when you were young, maybe you were one of the countless children around the world who learned by the Suzuki Method, named after its creator, Dr. Suzuki Shinichi, who died in 1998 at the age of 99. From 1946 to 1994, Suzuki lived in this simple home. In addition to seeing his study where he spent 6 hours every morning reviewing tapes sent by pupils from around the world, you can view short films in which Dr. Suzuki discusses his revolutionary teaching theory based on the belief that any child can be taught to play an instrument. Especially interesting is the 1955 film showing 1,000 Japanese children performing—in unison—Bach's Concerto for Two Violins, which is credited with spreading the theory to the United States when Mochizuki Kenji, a graduate student at Oberlin College in Ohio, showed it to one of his professors. Mr. Mochizuki now serves as the memorial hall's director. Matsumoto is also home of the **Suzuki Shinichi Talent Education Institute**, 3–10–3 Fukushima (© 0263/32-1611), where you can watch group lessons (advance reservations required) or see periodic concerts given by graduating musicians of the institute.

2–11–87 Asahi. © 0263/34-6645. Free admission. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm. About 10 min. by bus from platform 6 (bound for Osama Onsen) to Motoharacho, then a 5-min. walk.

WHERE TO STAY

Because Matsumoto is popular primarily with hikers used to roughing it along nature trails, accommodations are geared mainly toward convenience. Directions are from Matsumoto Station.

EXPENSIVE

Buena Vista ★ Matsumoto's biggest and fanciest hotel is a white gleaming structure popular for its conference and wedding facilities and with those attending the Saito Kinen Festival. Otherwise, it's a rather ordinary hotel, though it does boast more facilities than the other hotels in Matsumoto. The singles are very small, though windows can be opened. Rooms on higher floors have views of mountains in the distance. The rates below reflect the seasons, with the highest prices charged in summer peak season (July 20–Aug 31).

1–2–1 Honjo, Matsumoto, Nagano 390-0184. © 0263/37-0111. Fax 0263/37-0666. www.buena-vista.co.jp. 200 units. ¥8,000–¥11,000 (\$67–\$92) single; ¥18,000–¥22,000 (\$150–\$183) double; ¥17,000–¥28,000 (\$142–\$233) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. A 7-min. walk from the station. Turn right out of Matsumoto Station onto Shirakaba Dori; the hotel will be on a side street to the left. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, French, coffee shop); 1 lounge; 2 computers with free Internet service in the lobby; gift shop; salon; room service (7:30–10am and 5:30–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

⑤6 **Kurano Yado Ichiyama** ★★ *Finds* The Meiji-Era *kura* (warehouse) that used to stand here was torn down, and in its place is this six-story kura replica, which nonetheless imparts a homey atmosphere with its whitewashed walls, dark wooden beams, Asian folkcrafts, and architectural features common to the region. The five Japanese-style rooms have pleasing architectural features such as wood and bamboo ceilings, salvaged from the original building, while the eight Western-style rooms are spacious and uncluttered. All come with heavy shades to block light, and windows that can be opened. Full Western breakfasts are served in the pleasant ground-floor dining room, though you can opt out of breakfast and deduct ¥1,000 (\$8.35) from the rates below. In short, Ichiyama has more charm than most accommodations and is quiet despite its central location.

2–1–17 Chuo, Matsumoto, Nagano 390-0811. © 0263/32-0122. Fax 0263/32-3968. 13 units. ¥10,000–¥12,000 (\$83–\$100) single; ¥16,000–¥22,000 (\$67–\$183) double. Winter discounts available. Rates include breakfast and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. A 5-min. walk from the station. Turn left out of the station and then turn right onto Koen Dori (there's a McDonald's on the corner); it will be on the right, just past Parco department store and the park plaza. **Amenities:** Laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

MODERATE

⑤7 **Marumo** ★★ *Finds* This is my top pick for accommodations that epitomize the old-fashioned atmosphere of Matsumoto during the Meiji Era. Located in the traditional district of Nakamachi and occupying a kura and traditional Japanese inn constructed after the great 1888 fire that destroyed much of Matsumoto, it boasts a diminutive but eye-catching entryway of polished woods and antiques, very narrow stairs and corridors leading to Japanese-style rooms, and a wonderful coffee shop which has changed little over the decades. Rooms are simple and without the usual creature comforts, but the location is great and the atmosphere is truly one of a kind. If you're searching for "traditional Japan," this is where you'll want to stay.

3–3–10 Chuo, Matsumoto, Nagano 390-0811. ☎ **0263/32-0115**. 8 units, none with bathroom. ¥5,250 (\$44) per person without breakfast; ¥6,300 (\$53) per person with Japanese breakfast. Rates include tax and service charge. No credit cards. Town Sneaker Bus: Nakamachi (12 min.). Walk down Koen Dori (left of the station; there's a McDonald's on the corner) to Honmachi, turn left, and then turn right at Nakamachi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Matsumoto Tokyu Inn Visible from the station, this practical and clean business hotel's main selling point is its convenient location, which probably accounts for rates that are a bit higher than you would expect in Matsumoto (the highest rates below are charged in summer). The majority of rooms are singles and twins, all with semi-double-size beds with feather quilts. There are also six doubles and five deluxe twins, the latter with sofa, chairs, and a separate vanity area with its own sink. On clear days, rooms facing west have views of the Japan Alps.

1–3–21 Fukashi, Matsumoto, Nagano 390-0185. ☎ **0263/36-0109**. Fax 0263/36-0883. www.tokyuhotels.co.jp/en. 160 units. ¥8,500–¥9,700 (\$71–\$81) single; ¥13,000–¥18,200 (\$117–\$152) twin; ¥15,000–¥18,200 (\$125–\$152) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Turn right out of the station, then take a 2-min. walk. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western/Japanese/Chinese dishes); bar; salon; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

INEXPENSIVE

Enjyoh Bekkan Although it's a bit far from the center of Matsumoto in a community called Utusukushigara Onsen (Utusukushigara Spa), this member of the Japanese Inn Group is worth recommending for its free access to the nearby hot-spring public baths, only a 3-minute walk away, which offer both indoor and outdoor baths. This 30-year-old ryokan, with a quiet location facing a field of paddies, offers simple but clean and spacious tatami rooms, eight of which have toilets and sinks, the rest bathrooms. Dinner is served in your room, while both Japanese and Western breakfasts are served communally in the dining hall. The ryokan also has its own hot-spring baths, open 24 hours and with views of a garden.

110 Utusukushigahara-onsen, Satoyamabe-ku, Matsumoto, Nagano 390-0221. ☎ **0263/33-7233**. Fax 0263/36-2084. www.mcci.or.jp/www/enjyoh. 19 units (11 with bathroom, 8 with toilet). ¥5,300 (\$44) single with toilet only, ¥6,300 (\$53) single with bathroom; ¥9,800 (\$82) twin with toilet only, ¥11,400 (\$95) twin with bathroom; ¥13,200 (\$110) triple with toilet only, ¥15,400 (\$128) triple with bathroom. Spa tax ¥150 (\$1.25) extra. Breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra; Japanese-style dinner ¥4,500 (\$38) extra. AE, MC, V. Bus: 20 min. to Utusukushigahara-onsen bus terminal (the last stop), then a 5-min. walk straight ahead. **Amenities:** Hot-spring baths; in-room massage; laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV with pay computer games, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

⑤8 **Hotel Ikkyu** A bit on the old side but very reasonably priced and run by a friendly older couple, the Hotel Ikkyu is actually more a *minshuku*, with mostly tatami rooms but five Western-style rooms available as well. A profusion of plants in the hallways is a pleasant touch, but note that there are four floors and no elevator, and rooms are rather worn, with faded wallpaper.

1–11–13 Honjo, Matsumoto, Nagano 390-0814. ☎ **0263/35-8528**. Fax 0263/35-9500. 19 units (8 with toilet only). ¥4,000 (\$33) per person without meals, ¥6,500 (\$54) per person including breakfast and dinner. Rates include tax. No credit cards. A 12-min. walk from the station. Turn right onto Shirakabe Dori, turn left at the Green Hotel, and then turn right at the intersection where the street narrows; it's down the side street to the left 1 block before the bridge. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); coin-op fax machine. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

Matsumoto is famous for its buckwheat noodles, which are fairly thick with a hearty flavor and can be served hot or cold, with several kinds of dips and sauces. It is also known for its *basashi*—raw horse meat.

⑤9 **Kura** ★★ ★ *Finds* TEMPURA This convivial restaurant occupies the ground floor of one of the largest *kura* (warehouses) in Matsumoto, built in the late Meiji Period and rare for its three stories (most *kura* are two-storied). Enter the dining room through the thick vault-like door and sit at the dark wood counter (an excellent way to meet the locals) or at one of the tables. The restaurant is known for its delicious tempura, though it also offers sushi, grilled fish, basashi, and the local *zaru soba* (cold noodles) on its English-language menu. Your best bet is to order one of the set meals; kaiseki is available only with prior reservations.

2–2–15 Chuo. ☎ 0263/33-6444. Kaiseki ¥3,000–¥6,000 (\$25–\$50); tempura and sashimi set dinners ¥1,200–¥2,000 (\$10–\$17); set lunches ¥700–¥2,000 (\$5.85–\$17). AE, DC, V. Thurs–Tues 11:30am–2pm and 5–10pm. A 5-min. walk from the station. Walk down Koen Dori (left of the station; there's a McDonald's on the corner) and take the 1st left past the Parco department store.

⑥0 **Nomugi** ★ NOODLES There are only three tables in this well-known eatery popular with the locals, which means you may have to wait for a seat and can't dawdle over a meal. Its handmade buckwheat noodles are served until they run out, which is why the restaurant has a flexible closing time. You'll be given a sauce to pour into a cup; add green onion, wasabi, and daikon radish, then dip your soba into the mix. At the end of your meal, make a soup from the soba water stock (served in a teapot) and the soba sauce. In winter, the soba is served with boiled toppings.

2–9–11 Chuo. ☎ 0263/36-3753. Soba ¥1,000 (\$8.35); half portion ¥600 (\$5). No credit cards. Thurs–Mon 11:30am–4pm or 5pm. Town Sneaker Bus stop: Nakamachi. A 12-min. walk from the station. Walk down Koen Dori (left of the station; there's a McDonald's on the corner), turn left at Honmachi, turn right at Nakamachi, and then take the 1st right; it will be on the left.

⑥1 **Sano-Haru** *Finds* LOCAL SPECIALTIES Dining in this cozy, one-room establishment, opened more than 60 years ago by the present proprietor's mother, is like being an invited guest in the Nishimura home, with Mr. Nishimura behind the counter and his wife serving the meals. Tempura, sashimi, *yakizakana* (grilled fish), basashi, tofu, and seasonal dishes are available, ranging from bamboo shoots in spring (which are grilled in their husks and served with miso paste) to mushrooms in autumn, both gathered from the nearby mountain forests by Mr. Nishimura himself. He also grates his own wasabi. The best thing to do is to tell him what kinds of food you like and how much you want to spend, then leave the rest to him.

4–12–8 Ote. ☎ 0263/36-4943. Meals start at ¥3,000 (\$25) and go up. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 5–11pm. Town Sneaker Bus: Agetsuchi to the Nakamachi stop. A 20-min. walk from the station. Walk down Koen Dori (left of the station; there's a McDonald's on the corner), turn left at Honmachi, and turn right when you reach the castle; it's down this street, on the right.

⑥2 **Shikimi** ★ EEL/SUSHI For inexpensive Japanese fare close to Matsumoto Station, try this place specializing in eel and sushi. An atmosphere of old Japan is evoked by its traditional tiled roof, cast-iron lanterns, and interior with wooden sliding doors, small tatami rooms, wooden counter, and paper lanterns. I recommend the *unagi donburi* (strips of eel on rice), which comes with soup and pickled vegetables. If sushi is more to your liking, try one of Shikimi's platters of assorted sushi, called *moriawase*.

1–5–5 Chuo. ☎ 0263/35-3279 or 0263/36-7716. Unagi donburi ¥1,600–¥1,900 (\$13–\$19); platters of assorted sushi (*moriawase*) ¥1,600–¥3,000 (\$13–\$25). No credit cards. Mon–Wed and Fri 11:45am–3pm and 4:30–9:30pm; Sat–Sun 11:45am–9pm. A 3-min. walk from the station. Walk straight east out of the station on Ekimae Dori 1 block, turn left, and walk 3 blocks; it will be on the left.

Taiman (★★★) FRENCH If you feel like treating yourself, this ivy-covered, rustic yet elegant restaurant with a view of a garden is an excellent choice. In business for half a century and located just south of Matsumoto Castle, it offers wonderful French cuisine from a changing menu that might include grilled duck, whitefish in a shrimp cream sauce, scallops, lamb cutlet with pistachio, or grilled steak in a red-wine sauce. My yummy ¥5,000 (\$42) lunch—which included bread or rice plus salad, dessert, and coffee—started with an hors-d'oeuvre plate of marinated squid, lox, cream cheese, capers, and grated onion; the next course was crab gratin cooked in a cheese-and-tomato base resembling lasagna; and the main dish was sautéed pork wrapped in bacon and topped with cheese.

4–2–4 Ote. ☎ 0263/32-0882. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥3,700–¥8,000 (\$31–\$67); set lunches ¥5,000–¥9,000 (\$42–\$75). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm (last order 8pm). A 12-min. walk from the station. Walk straight ahead (east) on Ekimae Dori and turn left on Honmachi Dori with its post office; after the bridge, turn right at the 2nd spotlight where the NTT Building is.

2 Along the Nakasendo Highway: Tsumago & Magome

About 98km (61 miles) E of Nagoya; 88km (55 miles) SW of Matsumoto

If you're traveling between Nagoya and Matsumoto, you'll most likely pass through Kiso Valley in mountainous Nagano Prefecture. Formed by the Kiso River, the valley has always served as a natural passageway through the Japan Alps and was, in fact, one of two official roads linking Kyoto with Edo (Tokyo) back in the days of the Tokugawa shogunate (the other route was the Tokaido Hwy., which passes through Hakone). Known as the **Nakasendo Highway** (★★), it was the route of traveling *daimyo* (feudal lords) and their entourages of samurai retainers journeying between Japan's two most important towns. To serve their needs, 11 post towns sprang up along the Nakasendo Highway. Back then, it took 3 days to travel through the valley.

Of the old post towns, (63) **Tsumago** (★★) and (64) **Magome** (★) are two that still survive, with many of the old buildings left intact. An 8km (5-mile) pathway skirting the Kiso River links the two villages, providing hikers with the experience of what it must have been like to travel the 400-year-old Nakasendo Highway back in the days of the shogun. You can easily visit the two picturesque villages and take the hike in a 1-day excursion from Nagoya or Matsumoto, but I've included an overnight recommendation in case you want to linger.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Since neither Magome nor Tsumago is directly on a train line, you'll have to make the final journey by bus.

To reach **Magome**, take the **JR Shinano train** (which connects Nagoya and Matsumoto and departs hourly) to Nakatsugawa Station. Trains from Nagoya take about 50 minutes and cost ¥2,440 (\$25) for an unreserved seat; from Matsumoto it takes about 75 minutes and costs ¥1,890 (\$16). The 30-minute bus ride onward to Magome costs ¥540 (\$4.50), with buses departing once or twice an hour.

To reach Tsumago, take the **JR Shinano train** to Nagiso Station and then take a 10-minute bus ride (¥270/\$2.25). A taxi ride between Tsumago and Nagiso costs about ¥1,200 (\$10).

Note that not all trains stop in Nagiso or Nakatsugawa, so make certain your train does (trains stop in Nagiso less frequently, only five times a day). Note also that buses are infrequent; be sure to inquire about bus schedules beforehand (the Matsumoto Station tourist office has information on bus schedules; see "Visitor Information," on p. 262).

VISITOR INFORMATION The best way to obtain information about Kiso Valley is to stop by the **Tourist Information Center** in Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai international airports to pick up a leaflet called “Kiso Valley,” which provides a rough sketch of the 8km (5-mile) hiking path between Magome and Tsumago and gives some basic information about the villages; you can also stop by the tourist office in Matsumoto.

Otherwise, there’s a tourist office in Tsumago (☎ 0264/57-3123; open daily 8:30am–5pm) and one in Magome (☎ 0264/59-2336; open daily 9am–5pm except in summer when it opens at 8:30am). No English is spoken.

TRAVELING BETWEEN TSUMAGO & MAGOME If you can’t walk the entire distance between Tsumago and Magome, a **bus** travels between the two villages, so you could walk around Tsumago and then take a bus to Magome for ¥640 (\$5.30).

Especially useful for hikers is a **luggage-transfer service** available between Magome and Tsumago on weekends and national holidays from mid-March to mid-November (offered daily during peak season, July 20–Aug 31). Luggage is accepted at either town’s tourist office no later than 11:30am, at a charge of ¥500 (\$4.15) per bag, and must be picked up after your hike by 5pm.

WALKING THE NAKASENDO HIGHWAY BETWEEN TSUMAGO & MAGOME

Allow about 3 hours for the 7.7km (4¾-mile) hike between Tsumago and Magome. It doesn’t matter which town you start from, though starting from Tsumago is easier if you have heavy luggage being sent via transfer service, since starting in Magome requires an 8-minute walk from the bus stop up a steep slope to the tourist office. In any case, the trail is mainly a footpath tracing the contours of the Kiso Valley and crisscrossing the stream over a series of bridges. At times, the trail follows a paved road and leads through interesting farming villages. There are public toilets along the way. Since the trail does go up some steep inclines, be sure to wear your walking shoes. And have fun—this is a great walk!

TSUMAGO ★★ Tsumago, the second post town from the south, is the more beautiful and authentic of the two towns. Threatened with gradual decline and desertion after the train line was constructed in 1911, bypassing Tsumago, the town experienced decades of neglect—and that’s probably what ultimately saved it. Having suffered almost no modernization in the rebuilding zeal of the 20th century, Tsumago was a perfect target for renovation and restoration in the early 1970s, and in a rare show of insight, electrical wires, TV antennas, and telephone poles were hidden from sight along the main road. Thus, Tsumago looks much as it did back in the days of Edo. There are, of course, the ubiquitous souvenir shops, but many sell locally made crafts made of wood and bamboo.

On the main street of Tsumago, be sure to stop at the **Tsumagojuku Honjin** (☎ 0264/57-3322), an officially appointed inn that once served as a way station

Fun Fact **Daimyo Paranoia**

Daimyo (feudal lords) almost never ate meals prepared by local innkeepers. Rather, feudal lords traveled with their own cooks, who shopped for provisions in the village and then prepared meals in the inn’s kitchen. Even then the food was first tested by a taster before the daimyo himself ate, to make sure it wasn’t poisoned.

for the 30 or so *daimyo* (feudal lords) who traveled the Nakasendo Highway to and from Edo. Like all *honjin* (an inn designated as the resting place for daimyo), it's divided into two parts: a large, grand area for the feudal lord and his attendants, and a few smaller, simpler rooms for the Shimazaki family who managed the inn.

Apparently, the Shimazaki family had plans drawn up to rebuild their inn back in 1830. Renovation, however, didn't take place until 160 years later when an heir discovered the plans and gave them to the township, which rebuilt the inn according to the original plans using techniques dating from the period. You'd swear it's the original.

Across the lane is the **Waki-honjin Okuya**, the town's secondary inn, used by court nobles or by daimyo when the Honjin was already occupied. The present house, a lovely traditional structure with a garden, dates from 1877 and was rebuilt with *hinoki* cypress trees, a fact that has a special significance for this region. For centuries, all the way through the Edo Period, wood in the Kiso Valley was as good as gold and was used instead of rice to pay taxes. Commoners, therefore, were prohibited from cutting down trees, and those who did so literally lost their heads. When the Meiji Period dawned and the ban was finally lifted, wealthy landowners were quick to rebuild in a more stately manner. Emperor Meiji himself visited the inn in 1880, and though a special tub and toilet were built just for the occasion, he stayed only 30 minutes. Next door is the **Rekishhi Shiryokan**, which serves as a local history museum with displays of lacquerware, a model of how the Waki-honjin looked during the Edo Period, diagrams showing how trees were felled and transported from the steep mountainsides, and photographs of buildings in Tsumago before and after they were renovated. A ¥700 (\$5.85) ticket allows admission to all three museums; all are open daily 9am to 5pm.

MAGOME The southernmost post town, Magome has old inns and souvenir shops that line both sides of a steeply sloping, cobblestone road. It takes about 20 minutes to stroll through the town.

WHERE TO STAY & DINE

Both Tsumago and Magome have simple minshuku and ryokan. I'm partial to ⑥ **Ryokan Fujioto**, Tsumago, Nagiso-machi 399-5302 (☎ 0264/57-3009; fax 0264/57-2239), set back from the main road of Tsumago and buffered from foot traffic by a nice Japanese garden. The 100-year-old inn offers nine tatami rooms (none with bathroom) for ¥10,000 to ¥12,000 (\$83–\$100) per person, including two meals. No credit cards are accepted. What makes this a particularly good place to stay is the English-speaking owner, whose daughter volunteers as a free guide around town (you can request her services when making a reservation).

Even if you don't spend the night, you can sample the inn's meal of local specialties during lunch, served from 11am to 2:30pm daily. An English-language menu with pictures offers broiled trout, carp sashimi, raw horse meat, and other fare, as well as set meals for ¥950 to ¥1,400 (\$7.90–\$12).

3 Takayama, Little Kyoto of the Mountains ★★

533km (331 miles) NW of Tokyo; 165km (103 miles) NE of Nagoya

Located in the Hida Mountains (part of the Japan Alps National Park), **Takayama** is surrounded by 3,000m (10,000-ft.) peaks, making the train ride here breathtaking. The town, situated along a river on a wide plateau with a population of

67,600, was founded back in the 16th century by Lord Kanamori, who selected the site because of the impregnable position afforded by the surrounding mountains. Modeled after Kyoto but also with strong ties to Edo (Tokyo), Takayama borrowed from both cultural centers in developing its own architecture, food, and crafts, all well preserved today thanks to centuries of isolation. With a rich supply of timber provided by surrounding forests, its carpenters were legendary, creating not only beautifully crafted traditional merchants' homes in Takayama but also the Imperial Palace and temples in Kyoto.

Today, Takayama boasts a delightful and elegant historic district, called **San-machi Suji**, with homes of classical design typical of 18th-century Hida. The streets are narrow and clean and are flanked on both sides by tiny canals of running water, which in centuries past were useful for fire prevention, washing clothes, and dumping winter snow, but which now give the town its distinct character. Rising from the canals are one- and two-story homes and shops of gleaming dark wood with overhanging roofs; latticed windows and slats of wood play games of light and shadow in the white of the sunshine. In the doorways of many shops, blue curtains flutter in the breeze.

With its quaint old character, great shopping (including a lively city market), and museums, Takayama is a town that invites exploration. As you walk down the streets, you'll also notice huge cedar balls hanging from the eaves in front of several shops, indicating one of Takayama's sake breweries. Altogether there are six of them in Takayama, most small affairs. Go inside, sample the sake, and watch the men stirring rice in large vats. There are also a surprising number of museums, most housed in traditional homes and filled with historic relics and antiques.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Train The easiest way to reach Takayama is by direct train from Nagoya, with about 10 departures daily for the 2¼-hour trip that costs ¥5,360 (\$45) for an unreserved seat. There's also one direct train a day from Osaka via Kyoto, which takes 5¼ hours and costs ¥7,560 (\$63).

By Bus Buses depart Tokyo's Shinjuku Station six times daily from mid-March to the end of November, arriving in Takayama 5½ hours later and costing ¥6,500 (\$54). There are fewer departures in winter, when snowfall sometimes makes roads unpassable. From Matsumoto, the **Highland Express Bus** (☎ 0263/35-7400 in Matsumoto; ☎ 0577/32-1160 in Takayama) passes through mountain scenery on the 2¼-hour trip and costs ¥3,100 (\$26).

VISITOR INFORMATION Before you depart from Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai airports, stop by the **Tourist Information Center** for the excellent "Takayama and Shirakawago" leaflet, which contains maps and travel and sightseeing information. In Takayama, the local **tourist office** (☎ 0577/32-5328; open daily 8:30am–6:30pm, to 5pm Nov–Mar) is housed in a wooden booth just outside the main (east) exit of Takayama Station. You can pick up an English brochure with a map of the town showing the location of all museums and attractions. You can also use the tourist office's laptop for free Internet access, but you have to stand.

More information is available at www.hidatakayama.or.jp.

GETTING AROUND Takayama is one of Japan's easiest towns to navigate. Most of Takayama's attractions lie to the east of the train station in **San-machi Suji** and are easily reached from the station in about 10 to 15 minutes **on foot**.

Throughout the town are signs in English pointing directions to the many attractions; they're even embedded in sidewalks and streets.

An alternative to walking is to rent a **bicycle** from one of the many shops ringing the station; the cost averages ¥300 (\$2.50) per hour or ¥1,300 (\$11) for the whole day.

To reach Hida Folk Village and Hida Takayama Museum of Art (see below for both), you'll have to go by **bus**, which departs from platform 6 at the bus station to the left of the main exit of the train station. Better yet, take the free London Bus operated by the Museum of Art, with three departures daily from Takayama Station April through October. If you don't plan on visiting the museum, at least wander into the museum shop or have a cup of coffee on the outdoor terrace; from here it's about a 10-minute walk to the folk village.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Takayama's main attraction is its old merchants' houses, which are clustered together in San-machi Suji on three narrow streets called **Ichino-machi**, **Nino-machi**, and **Sanno-machi**. Be sure to allow time to wander around. In addition to the district's many museums, there are also shops selling Takayama's specialties, including sake, yew wood carvings, and a unique lacquerware called *shunkei-nuri*.

Be sure, too, to visit the **Miyagawa Morning Market**, which stretches on the east bank of the Miyagawa River between Kajibashi and Yayoibashi bridges. Held every morning from 7am (6am in summer) to 11:30am, it's very picturesque, with cloth-covered stalls selling fresh vegetables, flowers, pickled vegetables, locally made crafts, and toys.

And if you have more free time still, consider the **Higashiyama Hiking Course**, which takes you to a string of 13 temples and five shrines, nestled on a wooded hill on the east edge of town in an area called Higashiyama Teramachi. The path here stretches 3.5km (2¼ miles) end to end, but English signs are few and far between and the map provided by the tourist office is hopeless; you could consider getting lost part of the fun. The Higashiyama Hiking Course then continues through Shiroyama Park, site of the Kanamori clan castle until it was torn down in 1695 by order of the Tokugawa shogunate. Parts of its stone foundations still remain.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Note that the attractions listed below are closed during the New Year's holiday.

Hida Minzoku Mura Folk Village (Hida no Sato) ★★ ★ This is an open-air museum of more than 30 old thatched and shingled farmhouses, sheds, and buildings, many of which were brought here from other parts of the region to illustrate how farmers and artisans used to live in the Hida Mountain range. The whole village is picturesque, with swans swimming in the central pond, green moss growing on the thatched roofs, and flowers blooming in season. Some of the houses have *gassho-zukuri*-style roofs, built steeply to withstand the region's heavy snowfalls; the tops of the roofs are said to resemble hands joined in prayer. All the structures, which range from 100 to 500 years old, are open to the public and are filled with furniture, old spindles and looms, utensils for cooking and dining, instruments used in the silk industry, farm tools, sleds, and straw boots and snow capes for winter.

Workshops have been set up in one corner of the village grounds to demonstrate Takayama's well-known wood-carving, tie-dying, weaving, and lacquer-work industries; some of the artisans even live here. You'll probably want to

spend about 1½ hours here, but if you're heading to Shirakawago, skip it; there's a similar, more accessible open-air museum there.

📍 0577/33-4714. Admission ¥700 (\$5.85) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) children under 15. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Either take the bus from platform 6 next to Takayama Station (a 10-min. ride) or the free London Bus to the Hida Takayama Museum of Art (then a 10-min. walk); or walk 30 min. southwest from the train station.

Merchants' Houses ★★ In contrast to other castle towns during the Edo Period, Takayama was under the direct control of the Tokugawa government rather than a feudal lord, which meant its homes were built and owned by merchants and commoners rather than the samurai class that dominated other Japanese cities. Located side by side in San-machi Suji and both toured easily in less than 30 minutes, **Yoshijima-ke** or Yoshijima House (📍 0577/32-0038) and **Kusakabe Mingeikan** (📍 0577/32-0072) are merchants' mansions that once belonged to two of the richest families in Takayama. Of the two, the Yoshijima House is my favorite: With its exposed attic, heavy crossbeams, sunken open-hearth fireplace, and sliding doors, it's a masterpiece of geometric design. It was built in 1907 as both the home and factory of the Yoshijima family, well-to-do brewers of sake. Notice how the beams and details of the home gleam, a state attained through decades of polishing as each generation of women did their share in bringing the wood to a luster. Yoshijima-ke is also famous for its lattices, typical of Takayama yet showing an elegance influenced by Kyoto. But one of the main reasons I like this house is that its walls serve as an art gallery for the lithographs of female artist Shinoda Toko, one of my favorite Japanese artists (and a distant relative of present owner Yoshijima Tadao, who also uses the house for his other passion, jazz, heard softly in the back gallery).

The Kusakabe Mingeikan, built in 1879 for a merchant dealing in silk, lamp oil, and finance, is more refined and imposing. Its architectural style is considered unique to Hida but has many characteristics common during the Edo Period, including a two-story warehouse with open beams and an earthen floor. On display are personal items such as lacquerware and chests from Japan and imports from other countries, handed down through the generations and arranged just as they would have been in the 18th and 19th centuries.

North end of Nino-machi St., 1–52 Ojimachi. Separate admission to each house: ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for children. Summer: Both open daily 9am–5pm. Winter (Dec–Feb): Yoshijima-ke, Wed–Mon 9am–4:30pm; Kusakabe Mingeikan, daily 9am–4:30pm.

MORE MUSEUMS

Fujii Folk Craft Museum (Fujii Bijutsu Mingei-Kan) ★ This gallery in the heart of San-Machi Suji occupies a traditional merchant's storehouse; its entrance is a copy of an outer gate that once led to Takayama Castle. The eclectic collection from the Edo Period includes beautiful *tansu* (chests) inlaid with mother-of-pearl, sake and wine glasses, lacquerware, Imari and Kutani porcelain, tortoise-shell combs, ceremonial dolls, kimono, tea kettles, paper lanterns, rice barrels, smoking utensils, matchlocks, swords, farming tools, spinning wheels, and more. Many items are identified in English, making this a very worthwhile museum; you can see it all in about 15 minutes.

Sanno-machi St., 69 Kamisanno-machi. 📍 0577/35-3778. Admission ¥700 (\$5.85) adults, ¥350 (\$2.90) children. Daily 9am–5pm. A 10-min. walk from the train station.

66 **Hida Takayama Museum of Art (Hida Takayama Bijutsukan)** Serious glass lovers will not want to miss this museum with its collection of mostly European antique and contemporary glassware from the 16th to the 20th

centuries, including works by Tiffany, Lalique, and Gallé. Several rooms are furnished in decorative and applied arts by masters like Louis Majorelle, Mackintosh, and Vienna's Secessionist artists. Don't miss the museum shop, with its Japanese and imported glassware and crafts; I also like the Mackintosh-inspired tearoom with outdoor terrace seating. Plan on spending about 45 minutes here.

1-124-1 Kamiokamoto-cho. ☎ 0577/35-3535. Admission ¥1,300 (\$11) adults, ¥1,000 (\$8.35) university and high-school students, ¥800 (\$6.65) junior-high age and younger. Apr–Nov daily 9am–5pm; Dec–Mar Tues–Sun 9am–5pm. Take the bus from platform 6 to Hida Takayama Bijutsukan, or take the free London Bus, with 3 departures daily.

Hirata Folk Art Museum (Hirata Kinen-kan) ★★ Here you'll find what is probably Takayama's most varied and extensive collection of folk art. It vividly conveys what life was like during the Edo Period by displaying household utensils, crafts, and fine arts found in a typical middle-class home; the house itself, built in 1897 in the traditional style with a sunken hearth and both living and working quarters, belonged to a candlemaker. Items are identified in English. On display are folk toys, coin boxes, mirrors, toiletry sets, geta, spectacles, hair adornments, *shunkei* lacquerware, and paper and kerosene lamps; my favorite is the room outfitted with items used for travel, including guide maps, portable abacuses, compasses, a traveling pillow, a folding lantern, and even a folding hat. You'll probably spend 20 minutes here.

Ichino-machi St., 39 Kaminino-machi. ☎ 0577/33-1354. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Daily 9am–5pm.

Historical Government House (Takayama Jinya) ★★★ I highly recommend a visit here to anyone interested in Japanese history. The building served as the Tokugawa government's administrative building for 177 years (1692–1868). Of some 60 local government offices that were once spread throughout Japan, this is the only one still in existence. Resembling a miniature palace with its outer wall and an imposing entrance gate, the sprawling complex consists of both original buildings and reconstructions. In addition to administrative offices, chambers, and courts, the complex contained living quarters, a huge kitchen, an interrogation room with torture devices, and a 400-year-old rice granary, the oldest and biggest in Japan, where rice collected from farmers as a form of taxation was stored.

What makes a visit here especially educational are the free guided tours available in English, which last about 30 to 40 minutes and provide fascinating insight into administrative life during the Edo Period.

1-5 Hachi-ken-machi. ☎ 0577/32-0643. Admission ¥420 (\$3.50) for adults, free for high-school age and younger. Apr–Oct daily 8:45am–5pm; Nov–Mar daily 8:45am–4:30pm. A 10-min. walk from the train station.

Inro Museum (Inro Bijutsukan) ★★ ★ *Finds* If you're an enthusiast of the tiny, intriguing *inro*, a small portable medicine case, you must not miss this museum. If you're not yet a fan, you probably will be after visiting here. The museum displays Japan's largest collection of 18th-century inro and *netsuke*, toggles or counterweights used for hanging inro (as well as purses and tobacco pouches) from kimono sashes. All inro are displayed with their original and thematically matching *netsuke* intact, and some of the designs display a great sense of humor. More than 300 rare inro and *netsuke* are on display, and they're all wonderful works of art, with an astounding attention to detail. You'll probably want to stay at least 30 minutes, though I could spend hours here.

1-98 Ojimachi. ☎ 0577/32-8500. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for high-school, junior-high, and elementary students. Wed–Mon 9am–5pm. Closed Dec–Mar. In a beautiful *kura* (storehouse) just off Omotesando Dori, not far from Yoshijima-ke.

Lacquerware Museum (Hida Takayama Shunkei Kaikan) This museum, which can be toured in 15 minutes, displays Takayama lacquerware, known for the transparency of its finish, which enhances the grain of the wood. Takayama lacquerware is admired all over Japan for its honey-colored sheen, which becomes lighter and more beautiful over time. The museum displays some 1,000 items dating from the 17th century to the present, including beautifully crafted trays, furniture, vases, rice containers, and lunch boxes; one exhibit explains the multistage production technique and tools of the craft. There's also a shop—and after seeing the time-consuming process to produce shunkei ware, you'll know why prices are high.

1–88 Kanda-cho. ☎ 0577/32-3373. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) high-school and junior-high students, free for children. Summer daily 8am–5:30pm; winter daily 9am–5pm. A 15-min. walk from the train station.

⑥7 **Lion Dance Ceremony Exhibition Hall (Shishi-Kaikan)** More than 200 lion masks from all over Japan, used to perform the lion dance in Japanese festivals, are on display here, as well as Edo-Period screens, ceramics, scrolls, coins, samurai armor, and swords. Best, however, are the 15-minute performances given every half-hour by marionettes, which decorate many of Takayama's floats in its two festivals; they're capable of wonderful acrobatics.

53–1 Sakura-machi. ☎ 0577/32-0881. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) junior-high age and younger. Summer daily 8:30am–5:30pm; winter daily 9am–5pm. A 1-min. walk from Takayama Festival Float Exhibition Hall (see below).

Takayama Festival Float Exhibition Hall (Takayama Yatai Kaikan) ★ This exhibition hall displays four of the huge, elaborate floats used for Takayama's famous Takayama Matsuri (Autumn Festival). Dating mostly from the 17th century and colorfully decorated with carvings, hanging lanterns, and sometimes marionettes, floats are as high as 6.9m (23 ft.) and are mounted on wheels. Free 20-minute guided tours in English are available, making the festival hall an interesting stop if you're unable to see the festival itself.

The admission price also allows entrance to **Sakurayama Nikko Kan** next door, which houses a replica of the Toshogu Shrine in Nikko (p. 234), built almost 100 years ago at one-tenth the scale. I was initially skeptical, but the 28 buildings—complete with computerized sunsets and sunrises—are works of art.

178 Sakura-machi. ☎ 0577/32-5100. Admission ¥820 (\$6.85) adults, ¥510 (\$4.25) high-school students, ¥410 (\$3.40) junior-high age and younger. Summer daily 8:30am–5pm; winter daily 9am–4:30pm. In the precincts of Sakurayama Hachimangu Shrine, about a 10-min. walk north of San-machi Suji or a 25-min. walk from the train station.

WHERE TO STAY

There are more minshuku and ryokan in Takayama than hotels, making it the perfect place to stay in a traditional inn. In fact, staying in a tatami room and sleeping on a futon is the best way to immerse yourself in the life of this small community, and the best news is that there are places to fit all budgets.

You should be aware that in peak season—Golden Week (Apr 29–May 5), August, festival times in April and October, and New Year's—prices will be higher, generally between 10% and 20%.

All directions are from Takayama Station.

EXPENSIVE

⑥8 **Nagase** ★★ ★ *Finds* The Nagase family has been running this traditional inn for 250 years, spanning 10 generations. A renovated merchant's home not far from the Historical Government House that highlights the region's strong

architectural identity, it's filled with antiques. Each of the tatami guest rooms is unique, made special by carved wooden transoms, bamboo detailing, shunkei lacquer furniture, flower arrangements, and hanging scrolls in alcoves. Best of all, each room has views of one of six perfectly crafted miniature gardens, complete with small waterfalls and streams fed by natural springs that provide their own serenade throughout the ryokan. Kyoto-style cuisine and local specialties, served on beautiful lacquerware and ceramics, are brought to your room. If you are looking for an authentic Japanese experience (not to mention Takayama's most venerable inn), look no further.

10 Kami-Nino-machi, Takayama, Gifu 506-0845. ☎ 0577/32-0068. Fax 0577/32-1068. 10 units (8 with bathroom, 2 with toilet only). ¥15,000–¥17,000 (\$125–\$142) per person with toilet only; ¥18,000–¥30,000 (\$150–\$250) per person with bathroom. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service. MC, V. Just south of San-machi Suji, on Nino-machi St., a 10-min. walk from the train station. **Amenities:** Jacuzzi; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

MODERATE

⑥9 **Antique Inn Sumiyoshi** ★★☆☆ *Finds* This calls itself a ryokan, but its price and homey atmosphere make it seem more like a minshuku. Built almost 100 years ago by a well-known local carpenter to house a silkworm industry, it opened in 1950 as a ryokan and probably hasn't changed a bit since then. An open-hearth fireplace, samurai armor, and antiques fill the reception area, where you are invited to have tea or coffee, and on the second floor there's an outdoor deck facing the river. Rooms are comfortable and old-fashioned, and many have painted screens and antiques; request one facing the river, across which you have a view of the morning market. The older women running the place don't speak English, but they're very sweet.

Honmachi 4, Takayama, Gifu 506-0011. ☎ 0577/32-0228. Fax 0577/33-8916. 10 units (1 with bathroom). ¥8,000–¥13,000 (\$67–\$108) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service. No credit cards. Across from historic San-machi Suji on the Miyagawa River, a 10-min. walk northeast of the station. **Amenities:** In-room massage; laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea.

Best Western Hotel Takayama ★ Purists might decry the size of this 1998 chain hotel in such a historic town, but it does have a convenient location just a minute's walk from the train station and could be a lifesaver for those who do not like sleeping on the floor. Besides, at seven stories, it's not even the tallest building around, and its facade, with a replica Meiji-era design, could be worse. Otherwise, its mostly twin rooms are fairly small and ordinary, though cheerful and bright; ask for a room on a higher floor facing east, where you have a view of mountains in the distance. The rates below reflect the season.

Hanasatomachi 6–6, Takayama, Gifu 506-0026. ☎ 0577/37-2000. Fax 0577/37-2005. 78 units. ¥7,500–¥15,000 (\$63–\$125) single; ¥13,000–¥16,000 (\$108–\$133) double; ¥16,000–¥22,000 (\$133–\$183) twin. AE, MC, V. Walk straight out of the station for 1 block and turn left (1 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (steak, seafood, Western); lounge; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Four Seasons *Value* Although this modern-looking building with an arched roof looks out of place in Takayama, the hotel is a good choice in terms of price. Catering to business travelers during the week and tourists on weekends, it has an accommodating staff, free coffee and tea in the lobby, and a slightly feminine touch in its public spaces and rooms, which come with all the basics. Avoid the cheaper rooms on the second and third floors, as these have glazed windows. Rooms on the fourth through sixth floors have views over the city (request a corner room), with those on the sixth floor decorated with wooden furniture and wooden floors (important for the allergy conscious). A large Japanese bath with

Jacuzzi and sauna overlooking a small garden is a plus. (By the way, as you may have guessed by its rates, this place is not part of the famous Four Seasons hotel chain.)

Kanda-machi 1-1, Takayama, Gifu 506-0006. ☎ 0577/36-0088. Fax 0577/36-0080. fseasons@aiores.ocn.ne.jp. 46 units. ¥6,900 – ¥7,480 (\$58–\$62) single; ¥13,100 – ¥14,300 (\$109–\$119) twin. Rates approximately ¥1,500 (\$13) higher per person during festival times. Rates include tax and service charge. AE, MC, V. A 10-min. walk northeast of the train station. **Amenities:** Restaurant (local Japanese food); hot-spring indoor bath; Jacuzzi; sauna; rental bikes; in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Yamakyu ★ This spotless minshuku has a deserved reputation for serving the best meals in town in its price range, though everything operates so slickly that service seems rather impersonal. Although it's a bit far from the station—about a 20-minute walk or a 5-minute taxi ride—it's located in a quiet residential area near Takayama's many temples and shrines and is only a 10-minute walk or short bike ride to the historic district. Its hallways boast a good collection of folk art, antique clocks, glassware, and lamps, and eaves above all guest-room doors give it a slight "village" atmosphere. In the mornings, free coffee is available from the small lobby lounge, where you have a view of a small courtyard garden. As with most minshuku, the Japanese-style rooms—nicely done with natural woods and artwork—are without private bathrooms (though some do have toilets), but the public baths are large and pleasant and feature turning water wheels.

Tenshoji-machi 58, Takayama, Gifu 506-0832. ☎ 0577/32-3756. Fax 0577/35-2350. 28 units (15 with toilet only, 13 without bathroom). ¥7,800 (\$65) per person; ¥700 (\$5.85) extra for special meals featuring festival favorites at twice-yearly festival times (mid-Apr, Oct). Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service. No credit cards. Walk straight up San-machi Suji (20 min.). **Amenities:** Rental bikes (¥500/\$4.15 per day); in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Minshuku Sosuke The entryway of this warm and friendly minshuku is filled with country knickknacks. There's an *irori* (open hearth) in the communal room to the left as you enter—if it's chilly, you'll be invited to sit down and warm yourself. Although the building housing the minshuku is 170 years old, the inside has been remodeled, and all the rooms, though simple, are clean and are nonsmoking. Note, however, that some have skylights, and that morning arrives awfully early in summer. Also, though it's not far from the station, it's in the opposite direction from the town center, making it less convenient for sightseeing.

Okamoto-machi 1-64, Takayama, Gifu 506-0054. ☎ 0577/32-0818. Fax 0577/33-5570. www.irori-sosuke.com. 13 units (none with bathroom). ¥7,500 – ¥10,000 (\$63–\$83) per person with 2 meals; ¥4,500 (\$38) per person without meals. No credit cards. An 8-min. walk west of the station. Turn right out of the station and then take the 1st right (at the T intersection); it's over the bridge on the right side of the street, across from the Green Hotel. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

Rickshaw Inn ★★ *Kids* In a modern house, centrally located between the train station and San-machi Suji, the Rickshaw Inn is welcoming and homey, due in no small part to the friendly owner, Setoyama Eiko, a Takayama native who lived in the United States and speaks flawless English. A communal living room—with sofas, TV, newspapers, a table, and an adjoining kitchen complete with refrigerator, hot plate, microwave, and toaster—is a good place to relax with fellow guests. Simple Japanese- and Western-style rooms with sinks are available, with Asian artwork on the walls and batik shades to block out light. Good for families is the one Japanese-style suite, complete with kitchenette and bathroom, that sleeps up to five people. No dinner is served, but Eiko-san is happy to recommend nearby restaurants (ask for her map) and is also knowledgeable about

museums, crafts, and Takayama's history. A crafts shop with goods from all over Japan, Asia, and Africa occupies the ground floor.

Suehiro-cho 54, Takayama, Gifu 506-0016. ☎ 0577/32-2890. Fax 0577/32-2469. www.rickshawinn.com. 10 units (7 with bathroom). ¥4,200 (\$35) single without bathroom, ¥6,000 (\$50) single with bathroom; ¥8,400 (\$70) twin without bathroom, ¥9,800–¥11,000 (\$82–\$92) twin with bathroom. Western breakfast ¥550 (\$4.60) extra. AE, DC, MC, V. A 6-min. walk east of the station, just off Kokubunji St. **Amenities:** Coin-op washer and dryer; nonsmoking rooms; communal kitchen. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Takayama has some local specialties you should try while you're here (they may well be served at your ryokan or minshuku). The best known is *hoba miso*, which is soybean paste mixed with dried scallions, ginger, and mushrooms and cooked on a dry magnolia leaf at your table above a small clay burner. *Sansai* are mountain vegetables, including edible ferns and other wild plants; and *ayu* is river fish, grilled with soy sauce or salt. Other favorite dishes include Takayama's own style of *soba* (buckwheat noodles), *mitarashi-dango* (grilled rice balls with soy sauce), and Hida beef.

All directions given are from Takayama Station.

EXPENSIVE

70 **Kakusho** ★★ ★ *Finds* VEGETARIAN For a big splurge, dine at Kakusho, established 180 years ago and offering local vegetarian fare called *shojin-ryori*, typically served at Buddhist temples. Situated on the slope of a hill in the eastern part of the city, a 5-minute walk from San-machi Suji, this delightful restaurant serves meals either in small, private tatami rooms dating from the Edo Period or in a larger room from the Meiji Period that can be opened to the elements on three sides, all of which overlook a dreamy, mossy garden enclosed by a clay wall. You must make a reservation to dine here. The least expensive meals consist of various mountain vegetables, mushrooms, nuts, and tofu; more dishes are added for the more expensive set meals.

2–98 Babacho. ☎ 0577/32-0174. Reservations required. Set dinners ¥7,000–¥12,000 (\$58–\$100); set lunches ¥5,500–¥10,000 (\$46–\$83). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am or 1:30pm (2 lunch seatings) and 5:30 to about 7pm (flexible closing time). Closed some Wed, some Thurs. Just north off of San-machi and 1 block east of Kami-ichino-machi (15 min.).

MODERATE

Osteria La Forcetta ★ ITALIAN Although this small, peach-toned restaurant is cozy and inviting, the best seats are at one of the two tables out back on the terrace overlooking the Miyogawa River. The chef, trained in Italy, prepares delicious dishes like *anello grigia* (grilled lamb) and the fresh fish of the day and will even whip up vegetarian meals on request.

3–18 Honmachi. ☎ 0577/37-4064. Pasta ¥1,000–¥1,700 (\$8.35–\$14); main dishes ¥1,400–¥3,000 (\$12–\$25); set lunches ¥1,000–¥3,400 (\$8.35–\$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 11:30am–2pm and 6–10:30pm. On Honmachi St. (with covered sidewalks), north of Kajibashi Bridge (10 min.).

71 **Suzuya** ★★ LOCAL SPECIALTIES Darkly lit with traditional Takayama country decor, this restaurant specializing in Takayama cuisine is so popular that if you come for lunch between noon and 1pm, you'll probably have to wait for a table. There's an English-language menu complete with photographs and explanations of each dish, including such local specialties as mountain vegetables, hoba miso, Hida beef, and *tobanyaki*, which is a stew of leeks, Japanese green peppers, mushrooms, and various chicken parts (including liver, gizzard, skin, and meat) that you cook at your table. Also cooked at the table is *sansai-misonabe*, a stew of

Chinese cabbage, chicken, and various mountain vegetables flavored with miso. This restaurant is highly recommended.

Hanakawa-cho 24. ☎ 0577/32-2484. Reservations recommended in summer and during festivals. Set meals ¥1,300 – ¥4,000 (\$11–\$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 11am–3pm and 5–8pm. Just off Kokubunji St., halfway between the station and the Miyagawa River (6 min.); look for the curtains with bells hanging above the front door and the cedar ball hanging from the eaves.

INEXPENSIVE

Agura ★★ (Finds) LOCAL SPECIALTIES/PIZZA A converted rice *kura* (ware-house), with a high-beamed ceiling, wooden floors, slabs of wood for tables, and locally crafted bent-wood chairs, makes for a lovely, airy setting, heightened by eclectic cuisine, hip waiters, and jazz. The English-language menu has lots of great salads (I especially like the “Agura Original Salad” with lettuce, spinach, boiled egg, tomato, ham, tuna, and sprouts), pizzas fired in a wood-burning stove, and food that goes down well with beer, including roasted tuna with a honey sauce, Vietnamese spring rolls, and steaks served with garlic soy sauce.

4–7 Shinmeicho ☎ 0577/37-2666. Main dishes ¥880 – ¥1,500 (\$7.35–\$13). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 6pm–midnight. On the road that runs to the south of Takayama City Memorial Hall, on the right side (look for the green sign with the yellow seated Buddha; 12 min.).

⑦② **Myogaya** VEGETARIAN Just a minute’s walk east of the train station, this tiny shop packed with books and some health foods offers a limited selection of organic set meals (only available until 3pm) from an English-language menu, including chicken or veggie curry and stir-fried rice, which come with salad, miso soup, and vegetables. Drinks range from organic coffee to plum juice and wine made from organic grapes. The friendly proprietress makes this a pleasant place to come even for just a drink or a snack, served from 3 to 5pm.

Hanasato-cho 5–15. ☎ 0557/32-0426. Set meals ¥950 – ¥1,000 (\$7.90–\$8.35). No credit cards. Wed–Mon 11:30am–5pm.

4 Rural Shirakawago & Ogimachi

555km (347 miles) NW of Tokyo

With its thatched-roof farmhouses, paddies trimmed with flower beds, roaring river, and pine-covered mountains rising on all sides, **Shirakawago** is one of the most picturesque regions in Japan. Unfortunately, it also has more than its fair share of tour buses (especially in May, Aug, and Oct), but because of its rather remote location and because it’s accessible only by car or bus, Shirakawago still remains off the beaten path for most foreign tourists. A visit to this rural region could well be the highlight of your trip.

Although Shirakawago stretches about 39km (24 miles) beside the Shokawa River and covers 229 sq. km (142 sq. miles), mountains and forest account for 95% of the region, and Shirakawago’s 2,000 residents and cultivated land are squeezed into a valley averaging less than 3.2km (2 miles) in width. Thus, land in Shirakawago for growing rice and other crops has always been scarce and valuable. As a result, farmhouses were built large enough to hold extended families, with as many as several dozen family members living under one roof. Because there wasn’t enough land available for young couples to marry and build houses of their own, only the eldest son was allowed to marry; the other children were required to spend their lives living with their parents and helping with the farming. But even though younger children weren’t allowed to marry, a man was allowed to choose a young woman, visit her in her parents’ home, and father her children. The

children then remained with the mother's family, becoming valuable members of the labor force.

Before the roads came to Shirakawago, winter always meant complete isolation as snow 2m (6 ft.) deep blanketed the entire region. Open-hearth fireplaces (*irori*) in the middle of a communal room were used both for cooking and for warmth, and because there were no chimneys, smoke simply rose into the levels above. The family lived, therefore, on the ground floor, while upper floors were used for silk cultivation and storage of utensils. Because of the heavy snowfall, thatched roofs were constructed at steep angles, known as *gassho-zukuri* in reference to the fact that the tops of the roofs look like hands joined in prayer. The steep angle also allowed rain to run off quickly, and the thatch (Japanese pamgrass) dried quickly in the sun, preventing decay.

Today, there are about 115 thatched farmhouses, barns, and sheds in Shirakawago, most of them built about 200 to 300 years ago. The thatched roofs are about .6m (2 ft.) thick and last some 40 years. The old roofs are replaced in Shirakawago every April, when one to four roofs are changed on successive weekends. The whole process involves about 200 people, who can replace one roof in a couple of days.

Shirakawago's inhabitants live in several small villages. Of these, **Ogimachi** ★★, declared a UNESCO World Cultural and Natural Heritage site in 1995, boasts the greatest concentration of thatched-roof buildings. With just 600 residents, it's a delightful hamlet of narrow lanes winding past thatched-roof farmhouses, which stand like island sentinels surrounded by paddies. Many of the farmhouses have been turned into minshuku, souvenir shops, restaurants, and museums, including an **open-air museum** that depicts life in the region before roads opened it to the rest of the world.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The most common way to reach Ogimachi is by **bus** from Takayama, which takes about 1¼ hours and costs ¥2,400 (\$20). There are usually six departures from Takayama daily April through November, less frequently in winter (heavy winter snowfall sometimes renders the road impassable). Reservations are required (☎ **0577/32-1688**). From Kanazawa, a bus operates twice daily mid-March through November; the fare is ¥1,800 (\$15) for the 1¼-hour trip. In any case, buses arrive at a parking lot next to the Gassho-zukuri Minkaen open-air museum (below); minshuku are located on the other side of the river, reached via footbridge.

VISITOR INFORMATION There are two **tourist offices** (☎ **05769/6-1751** or 05769/6-1013; both open daily 9am–5pm). If you're arriving by bus, most convenient is the one located at the edge of the parking lot; the other one is across the river on the main road in the center of town. Both will reserve a room in a minshuku if you haven't already done so, and you can pick up a map in English.

GETTING AROUND Your own two feet can do it best. You can **walk** from one end of the village to the other in about 15 minutes; English signs direct you to the various attractions.

SEEING THE SIGHTS IN & AROUND OGIMACHI

In addition to an open-air museum, several old farmhouses in Ogimachi are open to the public. **Note:** Since Ogimachi is so small, no addresses are given in this section. This is a very small village, basically just one main street and some side streets.

Moments A View of Ogimachi

For an overview (and the best vantage point for photographs) of the entire village, walk along the gently sloping road that leads from the north side of Ogimachi to the **Shirayama Viewing Point** ★★. There's a souvenir shop/restaurant here, but the best thing to do is to turn left at the crest of the hill and walk to the hill's westernmost point (toward the river), where there are some secluded benches. From here, you'll have a marvelous view of the whole valley. If you're thirsty or hungry, go to the restaurant to buy a drink or a snack and then take it with you to the lookout.

73 Doburoku Matsuri no Yakata (Festival Hall) Not far from Myozenji (below) is Festival Hall, erected in honor of the Doburoku Matsuri Festival held in Shirakawago every year from October 14 to October 19. Centering on a locally produced, potent sake, the festival is held just outside the museum's grounds at Hachimanjinja Shrine. If you've never seen a Japanese festival, you might want to come here to see some of the costumes worn during the festival, sample the festive sake, and watch a 20-minute video of the yearly festivities.

📞 05769/6-1655. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥100 (85¢) junior-high and elementary students. Daily 9am–4pm. Closed Oct 14–15 and Dec–Mar.

74 Gasshozukuri Seikatsu Shiryokan ★★ *Finds* This thatched-roof farmhouse is the best museum in town for seeing local farm and household implements and folkcrafts, including cooking utensils, lacquerware, pottery, obento lunch boxes, coins, clothing, and other personal items. Note the bamboo pipe for bringing running water into the house, the Buddhist family altar, the samurai outfits, and photographs of the imperial family. The upstairs is crammed with all kinds of farming tools and items used in everyday life, from mountain backpacks and handmade skis to the wooden hammers used for pounding rice and the implements used for silk cultivation. The fascinating collection makes it easy to spend 20 minutes here.

📞 05769/6-1818. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Apr–Nov daily 9am–5pm. Closed Dec–Mar. Located on the southern edge of town past the Jyuemon minshuku (see “Where to Stay,” below).

Shirakawago Gassho Zukuri Minkaen ★★ To see how rural people lived in centuries past, visit Shirakawago's top attraction, this open-air museum with 25 *gassho-zukuri* houses and sheds that were relocated and restored here. Filled with the tools of everyday life, the buildings are picturesquely situated around ponds, paddies, flower beds, and streams, a photographer's dream. The museum also serves as an artists' colony, where artisans engage in such traditional handicrafts as woodworking, pottery, and weaving; their products are for sale on-site. You can easily spend an hour here.

📞 05769/6-1231. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) children 7–15. Apr–July and Sept–Nov daily 8:40am–5pm; Aug daily 8am–5:30pm; Dec–Mar Fri–Wed 9am–4pm. If Thurs is a national holiday, the museum remains open but closes Wed instead. Across the Shokawa River from Ogimachi, over a pedestrian suspension bridge.

75 Wada Ke ★ This thatched-roof home is Ogimachi's finest, not surprising since it belonged to the wealthy Wada family who served as the region's top officials. Still occupied by the Wada family, the 300-year-old house boasts carved transoms, painted sliding doors, lacquerware passed down through generations,

a family altar, and tatami rooms overlooking a private garden. Upstairs you can see how the heavy roof beams are held together using only rope (no nails were used), as well as containers once used in silkworm cultivation. It takes only 10 minutes to see everything.

📍 **05769/6-1058.** Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Daily 9am–5pm. Occasionally closed. Just north of the main street.

WHERE TO STAY

Because huge extended families living under one roof are a thing of the past, many residents of Ogimachi have turned their *gassho-zukuri* homes into *minshuku*. Staying in one gives you the unique chance to lodge in a thatched farmhouse with a family that might consist of grandparents, parents, and children. English is often limited to the basics of “bath,” “breakfast,” and “dinner,” but smiles go a long way. Most likely, the family will drag out their family album with its pictures of winter snowfall and the momentous occasion when their thatched roof was repaired. What I like best about staying overnight in Ogimachi is that most Japanese tourists (about 4,000 on average daily), are day-trippers, which means you have the village pretty much to yourself after late afternoon. Be sure to take an evening or early-morning stroll.

Most *minshuku* are fairly small, with about four to nine tatami rooms open to guests. Rooms are basic without bathroom or toilet (the communal toilets are sometimes nonflush style), and you may be expected to roll out your own futon. Privacy may be limited, as only a flimsy sliding partition may separate you from the guest next door. All recommended *minshuku* below are in thatch-roofed homes; rates include breakfast and dinner (add ¥400/\$3.35 in winter for heating charges), and none accept credit cards or have private bathrooms. The tourist office can make a reservation for you at these or any of the others around town.

⑦⑥ **Jyuemon** ★★ Jyuemon is a favorite among foreigners traveling in Japan. This attractive *minshuku*, in a 270-year-old farmhouse, features a stone-ringed pond with flowering shrubs and a couple of benches where you can relax and enjoy the view. In addition, there’s an *irori* in the dining room, and the bathroom facilities feature flush toilets. The outgoing 70-something Mrs. Sakai who runs this place is quite a character; don’t be surprised if she serenades you during dinner with a *shamisen* and folk songs.

Shirakawa Mura, Ogimachi, Ono-gun, Gifu 501-5627. 📍 **05769/6-1053.** 6 units. ¥8,000 (\$76) per person. A 10-min. walk from the bus stop, on the south edge of Ogimachi past Doburoku Festival Hall.

⑦⑦ **Koemon** ★★★ This is my top choice for accommodations, mainly because of fifth-generation innkeeper Otani Shoji and his wife Mutsuko. Otani-san speaks English and is enthusiastic about imparting information about his 200-year-old farmhouse, which became a *minshuku* 30 years ago and was

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many hotels, restaurants, attractions, and other establishments in Japan do not have signs giving their names in Roman (English-language) letters. Appendix C lists the Japanese symbols for all such places described in this guide. Each set of characters representing an establishment name has a number in the appendix that corresponds to the number that appears inside the oval before the establishment’s name in the text. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, **Wada Ke** (above), refer to no. 75 in appendix C.

recently modernized with a heated floor, automatic sensor lights, communal washlet toilets, and even dim switches to enhance the mood around his irori fireplace. Best of all, he has transformed his attic into a theater where he's happy to shows his guests 100 slides of Shirakawago through the seasons. Rooms are spotless, with the best one facing a pond.

Shirakawa Mura, Ogimachi, Ono-gun, Gifu 501-5627. ☎ 05769/6-1446. Fax 05769/6-1748. 5 units (none with bathroom). ¥8,000 (\$67) per person. A 2-min. walk from the bus stop, beside the footbridge over the Shokawa River. *In room:* Hot-water pot with tea.

⑦⑧ **Nodaniya** ★★ Life in this minshuku centers around the irori, where you dine on what co-author Janie considers some of the best food she's ever had in a minshuku. The family is very friendly. The minshuku is equipped with flush toilets and a communal cedarwood bath.

Shirakawa Mura, Ogimachi, Ono-gun, Gifu 501-5627. ☎ 05769/6-1011. Fax 05769/6-1218. 5 units. ¥7,700 (\$64) per person. A 7-min. walk from the bus stop, across from Hachimanjinja Shrine.

WHERE TO DINE

Since all minshuku and ryokan serve breakfast and dinner, you'll only need to find a place for lunch.

⑦⑨ **Irori** LOCAL SPECIALTIES A huge block of gnarled wood sits outside Irori's front door. Inside, this gassho-zukuri house is appropriately rustic and has an irori. The menu, in Japanese only, includes fresh river fish (*ayu*), wild mountain vegetables (*sansai*), *hoba miso* (soybean paste cooked on a magnolia leaf over a small clay pot), and *sansai* soba. I opted for the *yakidofu teishoku* set meal, which consisted of fried tofu covered with fish flakes, vegetables, rice, and soup. The food here is not sensational, but it is good for lunch and includes the local specialties mentioned above. In any case, there are hardly any restaurant choices in the village.

☎ 05769/6-1737. Set meals ¥1,200–¥2,000 (\$10–\$17). No credit cards. Wed–Mon 9am–5pm. A 5-min. walk from the bus stop, on Ogimachi's main road in the direction of the Shirayama Viewing Point.

Kyoto & Nara

If you go to only one place in all of Japan, **Kyoto** ★★ should be it. Not only is it the most historically significant town in the nation, this former capital was also the only major Japanese city spared from the bombs of World War II. As such, it's rife with temples, shrines, imperial palaces, and traditional wooden homes. In nearby **Nara** ★★, another former capital—one even more ancient than Kyoto—is Japan's largest bronze Buddha and more historic temples.

Even though its well-preserved architecture and relics are what put Kyoto on the sightseeing map, I've always felt that its scenes from daily life are what make the city exceptional. As you walk its narrow streets and along its tiny canals, you'll be struck by images of yesterday: An old woman in kimono bent over her "garden," a couple of gnarled bonsai beside her front door. An open-fronted shop where a man makes tatami, the musty smell of the rice mats reminiscent of Earth itself. A geisha shuffling to her evening appointment in Gion, where the sounds of laughter and traditional Japanese music waft past shoji screens and down the narrow alleyways. Couples enjoying a warm summer evening on the banks of the Kamo River, which cuts through the heart of the city. And spread throughout, an incredible 1,700 Buddhist temples and 300 Shinto shrines. Kyoto is home to 20% of Japan's national treasures. It is also home to the nation's greatest concentration of craft artisans, making Kyoto famous for its shops

dealing in textiles, dyed fabrics, pottery, bambooware, cutlery, metalwork, fans, umbrellas, and other goods.

As your Shinkansen bullet train glides toward Kyoto Station, however, your first reaction is likely to be great disappointment. There's Kyoto Tower looming in the foreground like some misplaced spaceship. Kyoto Station itself is strikingly modern and unabashedly high tech, looking as though it was airlifted straight from Tokyo. Modern buildings and hotels surround the station on all sides, making Kyoto look like any other Japanese town.

In other words, as Japan's seventh-largest city with a population of about 1½ million people, Kyoto hasn't escaped the afflictions of the modern age. Yet it has always led a rather fragile existence, as a look at any of its temples and shrines will tell you. Made of wood, they've been destroyed through the years by man, fire, and earthquake and have been rebuilt countless times. Come and explore—you'll soon understand why I consider Kyoto to be Japan's most romantic city despite modernization. No one who comes to this country should miss the wealth of experiences this ancient capital has to offer.

A LOOK AT THE PAST Kyoto served as Japan's capital for more than 1,000 years from 794 to the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Originally known as Heian-kyo, it was laid out in a grid pattern borrowed from the Chinese with streets running north, south, east, and west. Its first few

Frommer's Favorite Kyoto Experiences

Spending a Night in a Ryokan Kyoto is one of the best places in Japan to experience the traditional inn, where you'll sleep on a futon in a tatami room and be treated to a beautifully presented multicourse kaiseki feast. Though expensive, it's the utmost in simple elegance.

Dining on a Tofu Vegetarian Meal in a Garden Setting *Shojin ryori*, vegetarian meals served at Buddhist temples, are one of Kyoto's specialties. There are a number of rustic restaurants with outdoor garden seating throughout Kyoto.

Visiting a Japanese Garden Kyoto has a wide range of traditional gardens, from austere beautiful Zen rock gardens used by Buddhist priests for meditation to the miniature bonsai-like landscape gardens of the ruling classes.

Strolling Through Eastern Kyoto Temples, shrines, gardens, shops, traditional neighborhoods—these are highlights of a day spent walking through this historic part of Kyoto. You won't find a slice of old Japan like this in other Japanese cities.

Shopping for Traditional Crafts Traditional arts and crafts thrive in Kyoto, where skills are passed down from generation to generation. You'll find small specialty shops selling everything from fans to wooden combs.

Seeing How the Upper Class Lived Kyoto has more imperial palaces and villas than any other Japanese city. Walk through the shogun's digs at Nijo Castle and if you have time, visit the Kyoto Imperial Palace, Katsura Imperial Villa, or Shugakuin Imperial Villa with their splendid gardens.

Exploring Gion Kyoto's traditional pleasure quarter is fascinating for its austere architecture, hushed atmosphere, and the sight of heavily made-up geishas in traditional kimono hurrying to their evening appointments. Get an insider's look at this world at Gion Corner, where you can see performances of traditional dance, puppetry, and other cultural presentations.

Watching Cormorant Fishing Along the Oi River There's no more romantic way to spend a summer's evening than drifting down the river in a wooden boat decorated with paper lanterns, watching the fishermen and their cormorants at work. It's simply magical.

Taking an Evening Stroll Through Pontocho A small, narrow pedestrian lane, Pontocho is lined with a dazzling collection of brightly lit hostess bars, restaurants, and drinking establishments. If it's a warm night, end the evening by sitting for a while along the banks of the nearby Kamo River, a popular spot for Kyoto's young couples.

hundred years—from about 800 A.D. to the 12th century—were perhaps its grandest, a time when culture

blossomed and court nobility led luxurious and splendid lives dotted with poetry-composing parties and

moon-gazing events. Buddhism flourished and temples were built. A number of learning institutions were set up for the sons and daughters of aristocratic families, and scholars were versed in both Japanese and Chinese.

Toward the end of the Heian Period, military clans began clashing for power as the samurai class grew more powerful, resulting in a series of civil wars that eventually pushed Japan into the Feudal Era of military government that lasted nearly 680 years—until 1868. The first shogun to rise to power was Minamoto Yoritomo, who set up his shogunate government in Kamakura. With the downfall of the Kamakura government in 1336, however, Kyoto once again became the seat of power. The beginning of this era, known as the Muromachi and Azuchi-Momoyama periods, was marked by extravagant prosperity and luxury, expressed in such splendid shogun villas as Kyoto's

Gold Pavilion and Silver Pavilion. Lacquerware, landscape paintings, and the art of metal engraving came into their own. Zen Buddhism was the rage, giving rise to such temples as Saihoji Temple and the Ryoanji rock garden. And despite the civil wars that rocked the nation in the 15th and 16th centuries and destroyed much of Kyoto, culture flourished. During these turbulent times, Noh drama, the tea ceremony, flower arranging, and landscape gardening gradually took form.

Emerging as victor in the civil wars, Tokugawa Ieyasu established himself as shogun and set up his military rule in Edo (presently Tokyo) far to the east. For the next 250 years, Kyoto remained the capital in name only, and in 1868 (which marked the downfall of the shogunate and the restoration of the emperor to power), the capital was officially moved from Kyoto to Tokyo.

1 Orientation

GETTING THERE

FROM KANSAI AIRPORT If you arrive in Japan at Kansai International Airport (KIX) outside Osaka, the **JR Haruka Super Express train** has direct service every 30 minutes to Kyoto Station; the trip takes approximately 75 minutes. It costs ¥3,490 (\$29) for a reserved seat (recommended during busy departure times or peak season) and ¥2,980 (\$25) for a nonreserved seat, or you can ride free with your JR Rail Pass. A cheaper (¥1,830/\$15), though less convenient, alternative is the **JR Kanku Kaisoku**, which departs every 30 minutes or so from Kansai Airport and arrives in Kyoto 100 to 120 minutes later with a change at Osaka Station.

If you have a lot of luggage, I recommend taking the **Airport Limousine Bus** (☎ 075/682-4400) from Kansai Airport; buses depart every hour or less for the 105-minute trip to Kyoto Station. Fare is ¥2,300 (\$19) one-way.

BY TRAIN FROM ELSEWHERE IN JAPAN Kyoto is one of the major stops on the Shinkansen bullet train; trip time from **Tokyo** is 2½ hours. The fare for a nonreserved seat is ¥12,710 (\$106) one-way if you don't have a rail pass. Kyoto is only 20 minutes from Shin-Osaka Station in **Osaka**, but you may find it more convenient to take one of the local commuter lines that connect Kyoto directly with Osaka Station. From **Kobe**, you can reach Kyoto from Sannomiya and Motomachi stations. **Kyoto Station**, which is like a city in itself with tourist offices, restaurants, a hotel, a department store, a shopping arcade, an art gallery, a theater, and stage events, is connected to the rest of the city by subway and bus.

BY BUS FROM TOKYO Night buses depart from Tokyo every evening for Kyoto, arriving the next morning; the fare is ¥8,180 (\$68) one-way or ¥14,480 (\$121) round-trip. Buses depart from Tokyo Station at both 10 and 10:50pm, arriving in Kyoto at 5:55am and 6:32am respectively, and from Shinjuku Station at 10:45, 11:10, and 11:50pm, arriving in Kyoto at 6:02, 6:32, and 7:12am. Day buses depart Tokyo and Shinjuku stations several times daily, with fares starting at ¥5,700 (\$48). Tickets can be purchased at any major JR station or a travel agency. Contact the **Tourist Information Center (TIC)** in Tokyo for more information (see “Visitor Information,” in chapter 3).

VISITOR INFORMATION

Kyoto Station has two tourist-information facilities that provide maps and pamphlets and can direct you to your hotel. On the south side of the station, near the Hachijo exit and the terminus for the Shinkansen bullet train, is the **Volunteer's Service Tourist Office** (☎ 075/691-1000), staffed with English-speaking volunteers daily from 10am to 4pm. Bigger and better equipped is the **Kyoto City Tourist Information Office** (☎ 075/343-6656), located on the opposite (north) side of the station at Karasuma's Central Exit but up on the second floor near the pedestrian passage that runs through the building. It's open daily from 8:30am to 7pm.

Although these two facilities can provide you with basic information about Kyoto, the best place for information not only about Kyoto but about the rest of Japan is the **Tourist Information Center (TIC)**, a minute's walk from Kyoto Station's north side (take Karasuma's Central exit out of Kyoto Station). It's located on the ground floor of the **Kyoto Tower Building**, the one topped by what looks like a spaceship (☎ 075/371-5649); the entrance is around the corner on Karasuma Dori. It's open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to noon, and the staff speaks excellent English. On weekdays, you can also make reservations here for inexpensive lodging throughout Japan free of charge.

ON THE WEB Check out the city's websites at www.city.kyoto.jp/sankan/kankoshinko/visitor/index.html and raku.city.kyoto.jp/sight.html; www.kyoto-info.ne.jp has information on shops and restaurants.

TOURIST PUBLICATIONS In addition to the brochures and leaflets distributed by the TIC and Kyoto City Tourist Information offices, a monthly tabloid distributed free at hotels and restaurants as well as tourist offices is the *Kyoto Visitor's Guide*, with maps, a calendar of events, and information on sightseeing and shopping. *Kansai Scene* (also available online at www.kansaiscene.com) is a monthly giveaway with information on nightlife, festivals, and other events in Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe. In addition, a monthly English magazine, *Kansai Time Out*, carries information and articles on Kyoto, Osaka, and Nara. It's available in Kyoto for ¥300 (\$2.50) at Maruzen bookstore, located in the heart of Kyoto on Kawaramachi Dori just north of Kawaramachi-Shijo Dori (☎ 075/241-2169; open daily 10am–8pm, closed 3rd Wed of every month).

CITY LAYOUT

Most of Kyoto's attractions and hotels are north of Kyoto Station (take Karasuma's Central exit), spreading like a fan toward the northeast and northwest. The **northern and eastern edges** of the city contain the most famous temples.

The heart of the city is in **Central Kyoto**, which boasts the largest concentration of restaurants, shops, and bars and which radiates outward from the intersection of Kawaramachi Dori and Shijo Dori. It includes a narrow street called Pontocho, a nightlife mecca that runs along the western bank of the Kamo River, and the ancient geisha district of Gion.

FINDING AN ADDRESS Kyoto's streets are laid out in a grid pattern with named streets and an address system that's actually quite easy to understand once you get to know the directional terms. Streets north of Kyoto Station that run east-west are numbered; for example, the *shi* of Shijo Dori means "Fourth Avenue." *Agaru* means "to the north," *sagaru* means "to the south," *nishi-iru* means "to the west," and *higashi-iru* means "to the east." Thus, an address that reads Shijo-agaru means "north of Fourth Avenue."

Many addresses also indicate which cross streets a building is near. Take the Hotel Gimmond, for example: Its address is Takakura Oike Dori, which tells you that the hotel is near the intersection of Takakura Dori and Oike Dori. Complete addresses include the ward, or *ku*, such as Higashiyama-ku.

KYOTO'S NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

The following are Kyoto's main tourist areas; to locate them, see the "Where to Stay & Attractions in Kyoto" map on p. 294.

Around Kyoto Station The southern ward of **Shimogyo-ku**, which stretches from Kyoto Station north to Shijo Dori Avenue, caters to tourists with its cluster of hotels and to commuters with its shops and restaurants. Kyoto Station, which caused quite a controversy when built because of its size, height, and futuristic appearance, is now this area's top attraction with Isetan department store, a shopping arcade, restaurants, a cinema, a theater, an art gallery, and dramatic public spaces, including a rooftop plaza.

Central Kyoto **Nakagyo-ku**, the central part of Kyoto west of the Kamo River and north of Shimogyo-ku, embraces Kyoto's main shopping and nightlife districts with most of the action on **Kawaramachi** and **Shijo Dori** avenues. In addition to its many shopping arcades, restaurants, and bars, Nakagyo-ku also has a number of exclusive ryokan tucked away in delightful neighborhoods typical of old Kyoto, and it is home to Nijo Castle. Nakagyo-ku is one of the most

desirable places to stay in terms of convenience and atmosphere.

Pontocho, a narrow lane that parallels the Kamo River's western bank just a stone's throw from the Kawaramachi-Shijo Dori intersection, is Kyoto's most famous street for nightlife. It's lined with bars and restaurants that boast outdoor verandas extending over the Kamo River in summer.

Eastern Kyoto East of the Kamo River, the wards of **Higashiyama-ku** and **Sakyo-ku** boast a number of the city's most famous temples and shrines, as well as restaurants specializing in Kyoto cuisine and Buddhist vegetarian dishes and shops selling local pottery and other crafts. Eastern Kyoto is a great area for walking and shopping, particularly Higashiyama-ku, and boasts several ryokan as well. **Gion**, Kyoto's most famous geisha entertainment district, is part of Higashiyama-ku. Customers are entertained in traditional wooden geisha houses that are not open to the public (you can only gain entry through introductions

provided by someone who is already a customer)—but the area makes for a fascinating stroll.

Northern Kyoto Embracing the **Kita-ku, Kamigyō-ku,** and **Ukyō-ku** wards, northern Kyoto is primarily residential but contains a

number of Kyoto's top sights, including the Kyoto Imperial Palace, Kinkakuji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion), and Ryoanji Temple, site of Kyoto's most famous Zen rock garden.

2 Getting Around

Kyoto is Japan's most visitor-friendly city, with lots of signs in English and an easy-to-navigate transportation system.

BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION Kyoto has subway and bus networks that are efficient and quite easy to use, but one of the best ways to explore is by foot.

By Subway Kyoto is growing by leaps and bounds—there are now two subway lines. The older **Karasuma Line** runs north and south, from Takeda in the south to Kokusai Kaikan in the north, with stops at Kyoto Station and Imadegawa Station (convenient for visiting the Imperial Palace). The newer **Tozai Line** runs in a curve from east to west and is convenient for visiting Nijo Castle and Higashiyama-ku. Stops are announced in English. The subway lines intersect in Central Kyoto at Karasuma Oike Station. Fares start at ¥200 (\$1.65), and service runs from 5:30am to about 11:30pm. Although buses are generally more convenient (they usually get you closer to where you want to go), I sometimes opt for the subway even if I have to walk a bit, simply to avoid hassling with buses and their unknown stops.

By Bus The easiest way to get around Kyoto and to most of its attractions is by bus. Buses depart from Kyoto Station's north (Karasuma) exit, with platforms clearly marked in English listing the bus destinations. The TIC and Kyoto City Tourist Information Office give out a city map showing major bus routes (see "Visitor Information," above). Some of the buses loop around the city, while others go back and forth between two destinations. For tourists, old-fashioned buses nicknamed the **Chin-Chin** bus (bus no. 100) make runs every 10 minutes from Kyoto Station from 7:50am to 4:10pm, with stops in central and east Kyoto that are convenient to major attractions, including Kyoto National Museum, Gojo-zaka, Gion, and Nanzenji. The fare is the same as for other local buses: ¥220 (\$1.85) for a single fare or ¥500 (\$4.15) for a 1-day pass (good for all local buses). Chin-Chin bus no. 101 travels a different route from Kyoto Station northward to Nijo Castle, the Temple of the Golden Pavilion, and beyond.

Board the bus at the rear entrance. If the bus is traveling a **long distance** out to the suburbs, there will be a ticket machine right beside the back door—take the ticket and hold onto it. It has a number on it and will tell the bus driver when you got on and how much you owe. You can see for yourself how much you owe by looking for your number on a lighted panel at the front of the bus; the longer you stay on the bus, the higher the fare.

If you're on a **local loop bus**, however, the fare is the same no matter how long you stay on—¥220 (\$1.85)—and you pay when you get off. Exact fare is required, which you drop into the machine box next to the driver. There's also a change machine for ¥500 coins and ¥1,000 bills next to the driver; after getting your change, drop the fare into the box. There are no transfer tickets, so you have to pay separately for each ride.

TRANSIT PASSES If you think you'll be doing a lot of sightseeing in 1 or 2 days, it may pay to buy a pass. A **day pass** for buses only costs ¥500 (\$4.15); a day pass for both buses and subways costs ¥1,200 (\$10). A **2-day pass** valid for both buses and subways costs ¥2,000 (\$17). You can purchase passes at subway stations, the city bus center at Kyoto Station, and major hotels. Finally, **prepaid cards** come in different values and can be used for the subway and most city buses. Because there is no time limit, they're convenient if you're staying in Kyoto for several days.

BY TAXI Taxis in Kyoto come in two different sizes with only slightly different fares. Small ones are ¥580 (\$4.85) for the first 2km (1¼ miles), and large ones are ¥640 (\$5.35). Taxis can be waved down or, in the city center, boarded at marked taxi stands or at hotels. **MK Taxi** (☎ 075/721-2237) has the cheapest fares and also offers individualized guided tours in English.

BY BICYCLE A popular way to get around Kyoto is by bike, made easy because there are few hills and because most streets are named. You do, however, have to be on guard for vehicular traffic. **Kyoto Cycling Tour Project**, a 3-minute walk from the north Karasuma exit of Kyoto Station at Aburanokoji Dori, Shiokoji-sagaru (☎ 075/354-3636; www.kctp.net), open daily 9am to 7pm, rents bikes beginning at ¥1,000 (\$8.35) a day and even offers a delivery or pickup system for an additional ¥500 (\$4.15).

FAST FACTS: Kyoto

Area Code If you're calling a Kyoto number from outside Kyoto but within Japan, the area code for Kyoto is **075**. For calls within Kyoto, don't dial the area code. For details on calling Kyoto from outside Japan, see "Telephones," in "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2.

Climate Kyoto is generally hotter and more humid than Tokyo in summer and colder than Tokyo in winter. For more information, see "When to Go," in chapter 2.

Currency Exchange In addition to banks, good places to exchange money after banks close are large department stores like Isetan, Takashimaya, Daimaru, and Kintetsu, and the Kyoto Handicraft Center (p. 340). You can also exchange money at the World Currency Shop on the eighth floor of Kyoto Station (☎ 075/365-7750), open Monday to Friday 11am to 5pm. When changing money, be sure to bring your passport.

In addition to ATMs located at post offices (see "Post Offices," below), there are ATMs in Central Kyoto at the **All Card Plaza**, on the west side of Teramachi Street just north of Shijo Dori (☎ 075/221-4001), which accept American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard, Visa, and other cards operating on the PLUS and Cirrus systems daily from 9am to 8pm.

Dentists & Doctors The **Tourist Information Center** (☎ 075/371-5649) has a list of about a half-dozen dentists and about a dozen doctors who speak English. If the TIC is closed or you'd rather talk to a doctor directly, call **Dr. Sakabe**, Gokomachi, Nijo-sagaru, Nakagyo-ku (☎ 075/231-1624), an internist who speaks excellent English; he can refer you to other doctors as well.

Electricity In both Kyoto and Nara it's 100 volts, 60 cycles, almost the same as in the United States (110 volts, 60 cycles); your two-pronged appliances should work, but they'll run a little slowly (there are no three-pronged plugs in Japan).

Hospitals Most hospitals are not equipped to handle emergencies 24 hours a day, but a system has been set up in which hospitals handle emergencies on a rotating basis. If you go by ambulance, it must take you to one of these: **Kyoto Second Red Cross Hospital (Daini Sekijūji Byoin)**, Marutamachi-sagaru, Kamanza Dori, Kamikyo-ku (☎ 075/231-5171), is staffed 24 hours a day, but a referral by a doctor who knows your problem is expected. English is spoken at **Japan Baptist Hospital (Nihon Baputesuto Byoin)**, 47 Yamanomoto-cho, Kitashirakawa, Sakyo-ku (☎ 075/781-5191). Also in Kyoto are **Kyoto University Hospital (Kyoto Daigaku Byoin)**, Shogoin Kawahara-cho, Sakyo-ku (☎ 075/751-3111), and **Kyoto Municipal Hospital (Kyoto Shiritsu Byoin)**, Gojo Dori Onmae, Nakagyo-ku (☎ 075/311-5311). There's also a **holiday emergency clinic** on Shichihonmatsu Street, north of Marutamachi (☎ 075/811-5072).

Internet Access **God Mountain**, in Central Kyoto on the west side of the Shinkyogoku Dori covered shopping arcade (☎ 075/213-7880), is a bakery/coffee shop on the ground floor but has 10 computers on the second floor, for which it charges ¥150 (\$1.25) every 15 minutes. It's open daily from 8am to 9pm. Across from Kyoto Station's south (Hachijo) exit is **Top-scape**, on the corner of Karasuma Dori (☎ 075/681-9270), open 24 hours. You have to become a member for ¥200 (\$1.65), after which you pay ¥120 (\$1) for every 15 minutes.

Lost Property If you leave something on the **Shinkansen bullet train**, call ☎ 075/691-1000 to see whether it has been found. Items lost at **Kyoto Station** are turned in to the lost-and-found office (☎ 075/371-0134). If you lost something along a street or outside, contact the **Shichijo Police Station** (☎ 075/342-0110). **Taxi Kyodo Center** (☎ 075/672-1110) handles lost and found for all taxi companies. If you're still having problems, the **TIC** suggests that you visit their office.

Luggage Storage/Lockers Kyoto Station has lockers for storing luggage beginning at ¥300 (\$2.50) for 24 hours, including lockers large enough for big suitcases on its south (Shinkansen) side.

Police The national emergency telephone number is ☎ 110.

Post Offices The **Kyoto Central Post Office**, located just west of Kyoto Station's Karasuma (north) exit (☎ 075/365-2471), is open Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm, Saturday 9am to 5pm, Sunday and holidays 9am to 12:30pm. You can mail packages bound for international destinations here. To the south of the Central Post Office's main entrance is a counter offering 24-hour service (but not for packages or currency exchange); stamps for letters are sold from vending machines. There are also ATMs here, where you can obtain currency Monday to Saturday from 5am to 11:55pm and Sundays and holidays 5am to 8pm. The **Nakagyo-ku Post Office**, at Sanjo and Higashinotoin streets in Central Kyoto, also with ATMs, is open Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm and Saturday 9am to 3pm.

3 Where to Stay in Kyoto

If you've never stayed in a **ryokan**, Kyoto is probably the best place to do so. With the exception of hot-spring resorts, Kyoto has more choices of ryokan in all price categories than any other city in Japan. Small, usually made of wood, and often situated in delightfully quaint neighborhoods, these ryokan can enrich your stay in Kyoto by putting you in direct touch with the city's traditional past. Remember that in upper- and medium-priced ryokan, the room charge is per person, and though the prices may seem prohibitive at first glance, they do include two meals and usually a service charge. These meals are feasts, not unlike kaiseki meals you'd receive at a top restaurant where they could easily cost ¥10,000 (\$90). Ryokan in the budget category, on the other hand, usually don't serve meals unless stated otherwise, and they often charge per room rather than per person.

Kyoto also has excellent choices in all price ranges for those who decide to stay in a hotel (many hotels have Japanese-style rooms available in addition to Western-style rooms). Whichever type of accommodations you select, be sure to make reservations in advance, particularly in spring when flowers bloom, in autumn for the changing of the leaves, during summer vacation from mid-July through August, and during major festivals (see "Calendar of Events," in chapter 2). Some accommodations raise their rates during these times.

Because Kyoto is relatively small and has such good bus and subway systems, no matter where you stay, you won't be too far away from the heart of the city. Most hotels and ryokan are concentrated around Kyoto Station (Shimogyo-ku Ward), in Central Kyoto not far from the Kawaramachi-Shijo Dori intersection (Nakagyo-ku Ward), and east of the Kamo River (in the Higashiyama-ku and Sakyo-ku wards).

TAXES & SERVICE CHARGES Remember, hotels levy a 5% tax on room rates. In addition, medium- and upper-range hotels add a 10% to 15% service charge.

AROUND KYOTO STATION EXPENSIVE

Hotel Granvia Kyoto ★★ Opened in 1997 and owned by the Japan Railways group (holders of a Japan Rail Pass get discounts), this hotel boasts Kyoto's most convenient location for travelers arriving by train: It's right atop the futuristic-looking Kyoto Station. Only a minute's walk from city buses and trains, it's a great base for exploring Kyoto, Nara, and beyond. Thankfully, the hotel lobby is on the second floor, removed from the foot traffic of the station, and excellent insulation contributes to the tranquillity. A very good guest-relations desk can help with everything from sightseeing to restaurant reservations, and although there's no business center, behind the guest-relations desk are a workstation and computer with Internet access for hotel guests. Modern rooms are furnished

Tips A Note on Directions

For all hotel, restaurant, and other listings in this chapter, directions provided are from Kyoto Station unless otherwise indicated. Numbers in parentheses after stations and bus stops refer to the time it takes to reach your destination on foot after alighting from public conveyance.

with sleek black furniture and bathrooms have extensive counter space. If you can, avoid the least expensive rooms—they have rather unexciting views of the station's glass roof.

JR Kyoto Station Building, Karasuma's Central Exit, Karasuma Dori Shiokoji-sagaru, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8216. ☎ **075/344-8888**. Fax 075/334-4400. www.granvia-kyoto.co.jp. 539 units. ¥15,000–¥25,000 (\$125–\$208) single; ¥20,000–¥30,000 (\$167–\$250) double; ¥22,000–¥30,000 (\$183–\$250) twin. Executive units from ¥26,000 (\$217) single, ¥31,000 (\$258) double, ¥35,000 (\$292) twin. 10% discount for holders of Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** 10 restaurants; bar; 2 lounges; health club with indoor swimming pool, fitness gym, and sauna (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35); concierge; shopping arcade (in same building); salon; room service (6am–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, free high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

APA Hotel (Kyoto Ekimae) Opened in 1999, this smart-looking business hotel is a good choice for its location and even boasts a nonsmoking floor (a rarity for business hotels). Rooms are very small (the cheapest singles are minuscule) but pleasantly decorated and, though close to the train tracks, are relatively quiet. In short, stay here only if this book's top choices are full or if you don't plan on spending any quality time with your room. Note that ¥500 (\$4.15) per person will be added to the rates below on Saturday and the day before a public holiday; ¥1,000 (\$8.35) per person will be added from mid-March to mid-May and mid-October to mid-December.

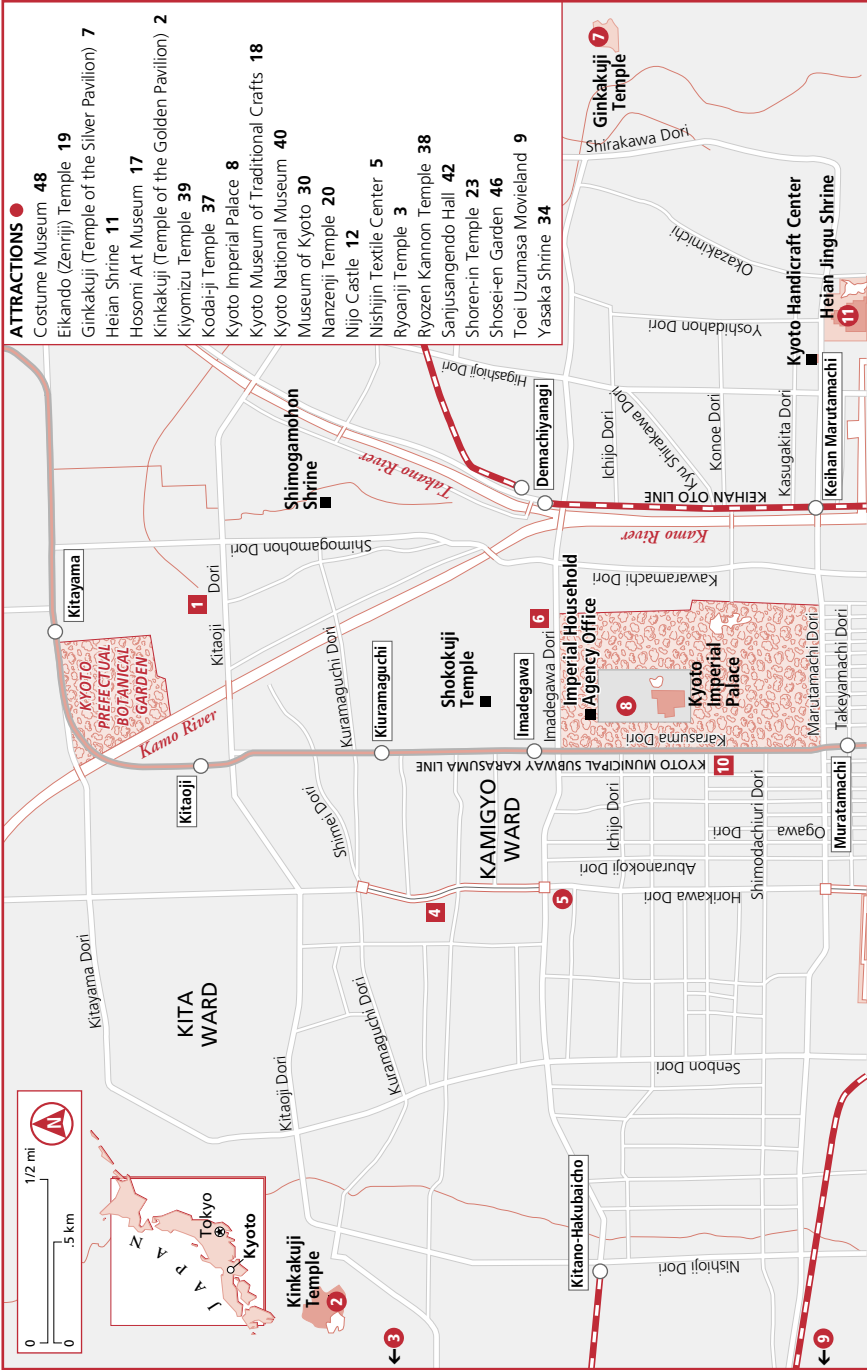
806 Minami Fudodocho, Shiokoji-sagaru, Aburakoji Dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8234. ☎ **075/365-4111**. Fax 075/365-8720. www.apahotel.com. 192 units. ¥8,000–¥8,500 (\$67–\$71) single; ¥15,000–¥17,000 (\$125–\$142) twin. AE, MC, V. A 3-min. walk from Kyoto Station's north Central (Karasuma) exit; turn left out of the station and walk between the post office and train station. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

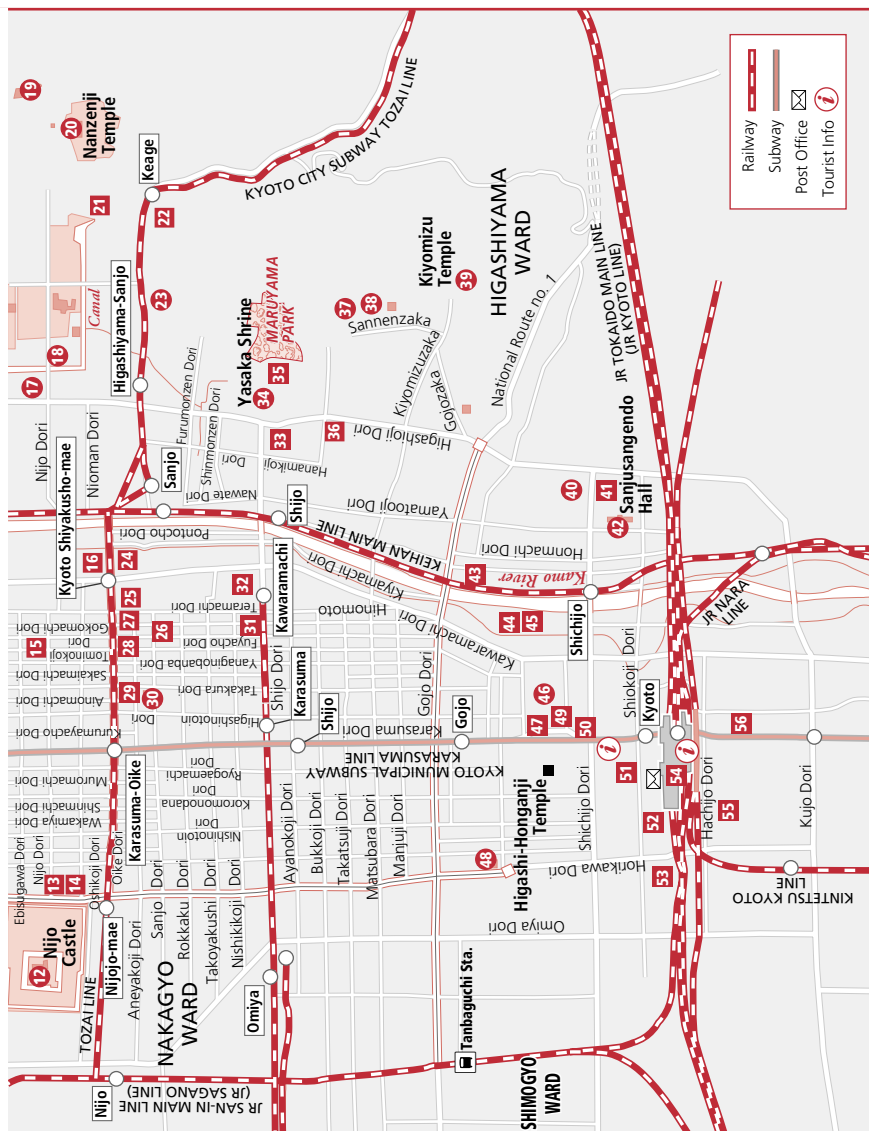
New Miyako Hotel ★ With the Miyako name behind it (it's a sister hotel to the famous Westin Miyako in eastern Kyoto), this is a popular choice near Kyoto Station due in part to its convenient location near the terminus of both the Shinkansen and Kintetsu trains (the city bus terminus, however, is a 5-min. walk away on the other side of Kyoto Station). Opened in 1975 but updated and renovated, it has a utilitarian, almost spartan lobby and rooms that vary in price according to floor and size, though the view is nothing special (children may like rooms facing the front, where they can see the Shinkansen trains arrive). The cheapest twins are so small that couples may fight over who gets the lone luggage rack, though the standard rooms are of adequate size for this price category. A plus to staying here is the free shuttle to The Westin Miyako, which is near the many temples of eastern Kyoto. I also like the rooftop summer beer garden with its all-you-can-eat buffet for ¥3,800 (\$32).

Hachijo-guchi, Kyoto Station, Kyoto 601-8412. ☎ **800/336-1136** in the U.S. or 075/661-7111. Fax 075/661-7135. www.newmiyako.co.jp. 714 units. ¥9,000–¥11,000 (\$75–\$92) single; ¥18,000–¥28,000 (\$150–\$233) double; ¥19,000–¥27,000 (\$158–\$225) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Across the street from Kyoto Station's south side (Hachijo Central exit). **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; bar; lounge; beer garden; souvenir and gift shops; salon; room service (7am–10:30pm); coin-op washer and dryer; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/on-demand pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, trouser press, washlet toilet.

Rihga Royal Hotel ★ This has been one of Kyoto's grand hotels since 1969, a familiar landmark topped by the city's only revolving restaurant (see p. 307 for a review of the Top of Kyoto). The building's aging exterior offers a modern

Where to Stay & Attractions in Kyoto





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rendition of traditional Japanese architecture with its railed ledges, but the lobby is rather confining and uninteresting, with a row of chairs near the checkout desk testimony to the sometimes long queues. Still, rooms are comfortable enough, with adequately sized standard rooms that feature shoji screens and window panels that close for darkness. The most expensive rooms—recently renovated and occupying the top two floors—have smart-looking Italian-style furnishings, better views, and spacious modern bathrooms. To aid the foreigners who make up about 30% of hotel guests, there's an English-language guest-relations coordinator on staff. Another plus is the frequent shuttle bus to Kyoto Station.

Horikawa-Shiokoji, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8237. ☎ 075/341-1121. Fax 075/341-3073. www.rihga-kyoto.co.jp. 494 units. ¥13,000–¥20,000 (\$108–\$167) single; ¥21,000–¥30,000 (\$175–\$250) double; ¥18,000–¥30,000 (\$150–\$250) twin; ¥35,000 (\$292) quad. Japanese-style units ¥30,000 (\$250) single or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Free shuttle bus every 10 min. 7:30am–9pm from Kyoto Station's Hachijo exit (turn left and walk to the end of the parking lot, past McDonald's), or a 7-min. walk from Kyoto Station. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 2 bars; lounge; indoor pool with sauna (men only) and Jacuzzi (fee: ¥2,000/\$17); concierge; complimentary shuttle to station; salon; room service (6am–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, trouser press.

INEXPENSIVE

Hiraiwa Ryokan and Annex ★★ This inexpensive ryokan is one of the best-known and oldest members of the Japanese Inn Group. The Hiraiwa family speaks limited English yet has been welcoming foreigners from all over the world for 50 years. The tatami guest rooms, spread through the 100-year-old traditional main building and a newer annex, are spotless. Breakfasts are communal affairs around the kitchen table, but note that a Japanese breakfast, which includes *kamameshi* (rice casserole), miso soup, and tofu, must be ordered a day in advance. There are showers and two public baths, but better still are the neighborhood public bath and sauna just around the corner.

314 Hayao-cho, Kaminoguchi-agaru, Ninomiyacho Dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8114. ☎ 075/351-6748. Fax 075/351-6969. www.w2.odn.ne.jp/hiraiwa. 21 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000–¥5,000 (\$33–\$42) single; ¥8,000–¥9,000 (\$67–\$75) double. Western breakfast (toast and coffee) ¥320 (\$2.65–\$6.15) extra; Japanese breakfast ¥1,050 (\$8.75) extra. AE, MC, V. Bus: 17 or 205 (don't take the express 205) to Kawaramachi-Shomen (3rd stop) and then a 4-min. walk from the bus stop, or a 15-min. walk from Kyoto Station. **Amenities:** Computer in annex lobby with free 30-min. Internet access; coin-op washers and dryers; communal fridge. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Hotel Hokke Club Kyoto *Value* Popular with tourists thanks to its great location just opposite Kyoto Station and for its reasonable rates, this chain hotel opened 80 years ago but underwent a much-needed renovation in 2000 and now offers clean and pleasantly decorated Western-style rooms, all with feather quilts and smallish bathrooms. Note that all the singles have tiny glazed windows (which could drive the claustrophobic over the brink) but do have semi-double-size beds. The most expensive twins, large for this price category, face Kyoto Station.

Kyoto Eki-mae, Shomen Chuoguchi, Karasuma, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8216. ☎ 075/361-1251. Fax 075/361-1255. 190 units. ¥7,200 (\$60) single; ¥11,000 (\$92) double; ¥13,000–¥18,000 (\$108–\$150) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Across from Kyoto Station's Karasuma Central (north) exit. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; Japanese-style pub; business center; in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Kuwacho Ryokan Despite its name, this conveniently located, family-run establishment is housed in a modern, concrete, three-story building (no elevator)

and offers an equal number of Western- and Japanese-style rooms (all with bath-room). I prefer the Japanese-style rooms (somehow, bare rooms are more becoming to tatami than to Western styles). Rooms facing the front also have the bonus of a small balcony. There's an international telephone with Internet access on the premises. However, no meals are served, curfew is at 11pm, and if you pay by credit card, a 5% surcharge will be added to your bill.

231 Shichijo-agaru, Akezu Dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8149. ☎ **075/371-3191**. Fax 074/344-2228. 14 units. ¥5,000 (\$42) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) twin; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple. ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra on Sat and holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. On Akezu Dori St., a 5-min. walk north of Kyoto Station's Karasuma exit; walk north on Karasuma Dori, turn right at Shichijo Dori, and then take the 1st left. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot, hair dryer, safe.

Matsubaya Ryokan ★★☆☆ *Finds* A member of the Japanese Inn Group, this highly-recommended traditional ryokan just east of Higashi Honganji Temple is a great choice in this category. First opened in 1885, it's owned and managed by the friendly and irrepressibly energetic septuagenarian Mrs. Hayashi, representing the fifth generation of innkeepers. She'll talk on and on to you in Japanese even if you don't understand, making you wish you did. Her best, slightly higher-priced rooms have wooden balconies facing a miniature inner courtyard or a tiny enclosed garden. All are tatami rooms with sitting alcoves. Telephone cards sold at the inn can be used from your room for international calls. Note that curfew here is 11pm, and when faxing to the ryokan, please be respectful of the time difference—Mrs. Hayashi isn't getting any younger, and she's been so kind to so many travelers.

Higashinotouin Nishi, Kamijuzuyamachi Dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8150. ☎ **075/351-3727** or 075/351-4268. Fax 075/351-3505. 11 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,700–¥5,200 (\$39–\$43) single; ¥9,400–¥10,400 (\$78–\$87) double; ¥13,200–¥14,600 (\$110–\$122) triple. Japanese breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra; Japanese dinner ¥4,500 (\$38 extra). Reservations require a 1-night deposit, payable by cashier's check, international money order, or credit card. AE, MC, V. A 10-min. walk north of Kyoto Station's Karasuma exit; walk north on Karasuma Dori and take the 3rd right after passing Shichijo Dori. *Amenities:* Lobby computer with free Internet access; coin-op washer and dryer; communal fridge. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Murakamiya Ryokan ★★☆☆ Near the Matsubaya (above), this pleasant and spotlessly clean member of the Japanese Inn Group offers nicely decorated rooms—some with old-style ceilings and woodwork—in a 70-year-old traditional wooden building with an inner courtyard garden. The owner, who inherited the inn from her grandfather, is friendly and accommodating and does her best to communicate, even though her English is limited. There's an international phone that accepts credit cards. A Japanese breakfast is available if you order it the night before. The ryokan locks its doors at 11pm.

270 Sasaya-cho, Shichijo-agaru, Higashinotouin Dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8156. ☎ **075/371-1260**. Fax 075/371-7161. www2.odn.ne.jp/ryokanmurakamiya. 8 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,500 (\$38) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) double; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple. Japanese breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra. AE, MC, V. A 9-min. walk north of Kyoto Station's Karasuma exit; walk north on Karasuma Dori, take the 1st right after passing Shichijo Dori, and then take the 1st left. *Amenities:* Coin-op washer and dryer (with free detergent). *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

Station Ryokan Seiki A member of the Japanese Inn Group, this five-story concrete building houses tiny Japanese-style rooms (the single rooms measure four tatami mats) that are a bit scruffy. Avoid rooms facing Karasuma Dori because they're quite noisy. Although close to the station, city buses depart from the opposite side of the station, about a 5-minute walk away.

24–5 Kitakasumaru-cho, Higashi-kujo, Minami-ku, Kyoto 601-8017. ☎ 075/682-0444. Fax 075/682-0171. www.stationseiki.jp. 17 units. ¥5,500–¥6,000 (\$46–\$50) single; ¥9,000 (\$75) double; ¥12,000–¥15,000 (\$100–\$125) triple. Western breakfast ¥600 (\$5) extra. AE, MC, V. A 3-min. walk straight south from Kyoto Station's south (Hachijo) exit, on Karasuma Dori (the one beside Avanti). **Amenities:** Coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

Yuhara ★★ This small ryokan has been welcoming guests from all over the world for more than 40 years and seems to be a favorite of visiting journalists, as evidenced by the many framed newspaper articles written about the ryokan that line the corridor walls. It has one of the most picturesque, pleasant settings in all of Kyoto—beside the tree-lined narrow Takasegawa canal in a quiet residential area that's a 13-minute walk from Kyoto Station—and is run by an enthusiastic woman who speaks some English. There are nice touches everywhere, from shoji screens and artwork in the rooms to plants and bamboo decorations in the hallways. One of the rooms is Western style, and three come with a sink. The largest room looks out onto a miniature courtyard. Guests are requested to vacate their rooms from 10am to 3pm, and there's an 11pm curfew.

188 Kagiya-cho, Shomen-agaru, Kiyamachi Dori, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8126. ☎ 075/371-9583. Fax 075/371-9583. 8 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) per person. AE, MC, V. Bus: 17 or 205 (don't take the express bus) to Kawaramachi-Shomen (the 3rd stop), and then a 2-min. walk (take the side street beside Tony Lama and turn right after the canal), or a 13-min. walk from the station. *In room:* A/C, coin-op TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

CENTRAL KYOTO VERY EXPENSIVE

Hiiragiya Ryokan ★★ This exquisite ryokan is as fine an example of a traditional inn as you'll find in Japan. Situated in the heart of old Kyoto, it offers the ultimate in Japanese-style living, with a very accommodating staff that's helpful in initiating foreigners unfamiliar with Japan to the joys of a ryokan. Noteworthy former guests include princes of the Japanese royal family, Charlie Chaplin, and Pierre Cardin. If you're going to splurge just once in Japan, this is one of my top choices.

Built in 1818 and an inn since 1861—and under the same family's ownership for seven generations—Hiiragiya is a haven of simple design that makes artful use of wood, bamboo, screens, and stones in its spacious, traditionally arranged rooms. Even the remote controls for the lights and curtains are cleverly concealed in specially made lacquered boxes shaped like gourds (invented by the present owner's great-grandfather). Rooms, each one unique, are also outfitted with art and antiques such as gold-painted folding screens or lacquered bath-rooms, and most offer garden views. Dinners are exquisite multicourse kaiseki feasts; Western-style breakfasts are available upon request.

Fuyacho, Anekoji-agaru, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8094. ☎ 075/221-1136. Fax 075/221-1139. www.hiiragiya.co.jp. 21 units. ¥30,000–¥50,000 (\$250–\$417) per person. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Located on the corner of Fuyacho and Oike sts. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (4 min.) or Karasuma-Oike (7 min.). Bus: 17 or 205 to Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (5 min.). Taxi: 10 min. **Amenities:** In-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

⑧ **Kinmata** ★★ With only three rooms, this beautiful, Meiji-Era, traditional wooden inn in the heart of Kyoto is exquisite inside and out, an oasis of the best old Japan has to offer. First opened in the early 1800s, its earliest customers were medicine peddlers; an old sign announcing the house rules of past centuries—no gambling, no prostitution, no mah-jongg, no noisy parties—still

hangs in the hallway. The present owner, Mr. Ukai, represents the seventh generation of innkeepers here and is renowned as a master chef, preparing wonderful kaiseki meals for his guests. Indeed, meals, which are served on Imari porcelain that has been passed down through the family for generations, are one of the primary reasons for staying here (dinner is served in your room, but Japanese or Western breakfasts are served in a modern dining hall). Even if you don't spend the night, you can come for a meal (lunch is ¥6,000/\$50 and up for table seating, ¥8,000/\$67 for Japanese-style seating). Pluses are the public cypress bath, an inner courtyard, and a peaceful garden. Note, however, that there's an 11pm curfew.

407 Gokomachi, Shijo-agaru, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8044. ☎ 075/221-1039. Fax 075/231-7632. www.kinmata.com. 3 units (with toilet only). ¥30,000–¥35,000 (\$250–\$292) per person, including 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Just north of Shijo Dori Ave. on Gokomachi St. Subway: Shijo (7 min.). Bus: 5 to Shijo-Fuyacho (1 min.). *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Sumiya ★★ Like the other traditional Japanese inns listed here, the 100-year-old Sumiya has a great location in a typical Kyoto neighborhood but is less than a 5-minute walk from downtown Kyoto. Offering excellent service amid simple yet elegant surroundings, it has a variety of rooms, some with wonderful views of tiny private gardens with outdoor benches and platforms for sitting. Oriental rugs, however, have been placed over the tatami mats in some of the rooms, which doesn't seem quite right. Meals feature Kyoto kaiseki cuisine; Western breakfasts are also available.

Sanjo-sagaru, Fuyacho, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8075. ☎ 075/221-2188. Fax 075/221-2267. 23 units (17 with bathroom). ¥25,000–¥60,000 (\$208–\$500) per person, including 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. On Fuyacho Dori just south of Sanjo St. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (6 min.) or Karasuma-Oike (9 min.). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo (5 min.). Taxi: 10 min. **Amenities:** In-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

Tawaraya ★★★ Across the street from the Hiiragiya (see above) is another distinguished, venerable old inn, which has been owned and operated by the same family since it opened in the first decade of the 1700s (the present owner, Mrs. Toshi Okazaki Sato, is the 11th generation of innkeepers). Unfortunately, fire consumed the original building, so the oldest part of the ryokan now dates back a mere 175 years. This inn has had an impressive list of former guests, from former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to Leonard Bernstein and Alfred Hitchcock. Saul Bellow wrote in the ryokan's guest book, "I found here what I had hoped to find in Japan—the human scale, tranquility, and beauty."

With refined taste reigning supreme, each room is different and exquisitely appointed. Some, for example, have glass sliding doors opening onto a mossy garden of bamboo, stone lanterns, and manicured bushes, with cushions on a wooden veranda where you can sit and soak in the peacefulness.

Oike-Sagaru, Fuyacho, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8094. ☎ 075/211-5566. Fax 075/211-2204. 18 units. ¥35,000–¥75,000 (\$292–\$625) per person, including 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (4 min.) or Karasuma-Oike (7 min.). Bus: 17 or 205 to Shiyakusho-mae (5 min.). Taxi: 10 min. **Amenities:** In-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

EXPENSIVE

Kyoto Hotel Okura ★★★ First built in 1888, one of Kyoto's oldest hotels underwent a complete metamorphosis and reopened in 1994 as the city's tallest building, with 17 floors. Its height caused a stir of protest by those who advocate stricter height restrictions; though I usually side with historic preservationists, I must admit that no finer building could have violated the skyline. Its modern

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many hotels, restaurants, attractions, and other establishments in Japan do not have signs giving their names in Roman (English-language) letters. Appendix C in this book lists the Japanese symbols for all such places described in this guide. Each set of characters representing an establishment name has a number in the appendix that corresponds to the number that appears inside the oval before the establishment's name in the text. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, the **Kinmata** (above), refer to no. 80 in appendix C.

facade hints at traditional Japanese latticework, while the spacious lobby, designed after the hotel's original 1920s ballroom, exudes a gracefully elegant old-world ambience. Restaurants on the top floor offer stunning views.

Luxurious accommodations, a convenient location in the heart of Kyoto, and an English-speaking staff that makes a special effort to be hospitable (their motto is "Service with a Smile") come together to make this an excellent choice. Rooms, built around a central atrium, are the utmost in comfort and grandeur, with deep carpeting, rich textiles, vanities, and large bathrooms which, with the exception of single rooms, have separate shower stalls and tubs. The most expensive rooms are on upper floors with views over the Kamo River toward Higashiyama-ku. The only drawback is that the indoor pool and related facilities are open to guests only from 7 to 10am, after which they become a private club.

Kawaramachi-Oike, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8558. ☎ **075/211-5111** or 075/223-2333 for reservations. Fax 075/221-7770. www.kyotohotel.co.jp. 322 units. ¥16,000–¥18,000 (\$133–\$150) single; ¥31,000–¥45,000 (\$258–\$375) double; ¥25,000–¥45,000 (\$208–\$375) twin; ¥50,000 (\$417) quad; from ¥38,000 (\$317) executive twin or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (1 min., below the hotel). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi shiyakusho-mae (2 min.). **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; bar; lounge; indoor pool with Jacuzzi and sauna (fee: ¥2,000/\$17); children's day-care center open daily 9am–6pm (¥5,000/\$42 for 2 hr.); concierge; shopping arcade; salon; room service (7am–midnight); in-room massage; babysitting room; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Kyoto Royal Hotel ★ The main reason to stay here? Location, location, location. In the heart of Kyoto on Kawaramachi Dori, this typical tourist hotel has a friendly staff and was stylishly renovated in 2001 to achieve a top-class atmosphere, but it can't compete with the facilities and grandeur of Kyoto's other top hotels. Still, it's a convenient base for sightseeing and has an information desk to answer guest questions. Chic blonde-and-black furnished rooms feature focused bedside reading lamps but are otherwise fairly basic. Note that most single rooms and some doubles face an inner courtyard, which cuts down on noise but also on sunshine, while rooms that face the Kamo River have better views but are minuscule. Again, the best reason to stay here is location.

Sanjo-agaru Kawaramachi, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8005. ☎ **075/223-1234**. Fax 075/223-1702. www.kyoto-royal.co.jp. 335 units. ¥16,000–¥18,000 (\$133–\$150) single; ¥24,000–¥26,000 (\$200–\$217) double; ¥26,000–¥30,000 (\$217–\$250) twin; ¥47,000 (\$392) quad. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (2 min.). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo (2 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, coffee shop); bar; 2 lounges; concierge; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

ANA Hotel Kyoto (Zenniku Hotel Kyoto) ★★ Just across the street from Nijo Castle and offering rooms with castle views, this hotel has one of the most stunning lobby lounges in town, complete with a glass wall overlooking an impressive waterfall and tiny landscape garden, all to the accompaniment of koto music (a Japanese stringed instrument). Rooms are attractive if a bit cramped, with well-crafted, Asian-accented furniture, roomy bathrooms, and unusual extras like free Internet access, foot massagers, shoe dryers, de-humidifiers (handy during the rainy season), and ion-free hair dryers and hair brushes. None of the singles face the castle; twin and double rooms that do—with floor-to-ceiling windows—start at ¥24,000 (\$200) during the regular season and ¥26,000 (\$217) during April, May, October, November, and summer and New Year vacations.

Nijojo-mae, Horikawa Dori, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-0055. ☎ 800/ANA-HOTELS in the U.S. and Canada or 075/231-1155. Fax 075/231-5333. www.anahotels.com/eng/index.html. 301 units. ¥13,000 (\$92) single; ¥19,000–¥24,000 (\$158–\$200) double; ¥19,000–¥28,000 (\$158–\$233) twin. ¥1,000–¥2,000 (\$8.35–\$17) extra per person Apr, May, Oct, Nov, Sat and nights before holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Nijojo-mae (1 min.). Bus: 9, 50, or 101 to Nijojo-mae. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, French, Chinese, coffee shop); bar; lounge; indoor pool and sauna (fee: ¥3,000/\$25); shopping arcade; room service (7am–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, ion-free hair dryer, bathroom scale, washlet toilet, shoe dryer, foot massager, de-humidifier.

Hotel Gimmond This small hotel on Oike Dori was built just 20-some years ago, but it achieves an older ambience in its lobby with the clever use of antique-looking lighting and decor. Though the hotel calls itself a tourist hotel and offers mainly twins, its accommodations and lack of services and facilities place it in the category of business hotel. Simple rooms show their age and are soundproof, but I still think those that face away from Oike Dori are quieter; ask for one on a higher floor. The cheapest rooms are quite small.

Takakura Oike Dori, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8105. ☎ 075/221-4111. Fax 075/221-8250. www.gimmond.co.jp. 140 units. ¥8,300–¥9,300 (\$69–\$78) single; ¥14,000 (\$117) double; ¥14,500–¥20,000 (\$121–\$167) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Karasuma-Oike (2 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); bar; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

International Hotel Kyoto (Kyoto Kokusai Hotel) ★ I like this hotel across from Nijo Castle because it offers a few surprises you wouldn't expect to find in medium-range accommodations. Billing itself as a Western-style hotel with a Japanese atmosphere, it has a very nice lobby overlooking a pleasant, lush garden, which you can gaze upon from either the lobby tea lounge or the buffet-style restaurant, Azalea (p. 312). Every evening at 7:30pm, the garden also serves as a stage for a free 15-minute dance presentation given by *maiko* (geisha apprentices). Room rates are based on decor and amenities; renovated rooms cost more and offer such luxuries as washlet toilets and bathroom scales. All rooms are comfortable and are outfitted with shoji screens; approximately 50 twins and two doubles face Nijo Castle, but none of the singles do. Despite the hotel's name, more than 90% of its guests are Japanese.

Nijojo-mae, Horikawa Dori, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8502. ☎ 075/222-1111. Fax 075/231-9381. 274 units. ¥9,000–¥18,000 (\$75–\$150) single; ¥16,000–¥27,000 (\$133–\$225) double; ¥14,000–¥29,000 (\$117–\$242) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Nijojo-mae (2 min.). Bus: 9, 50, or 101 to Nijojo-mae (2 min.). Across from Nijo Castle. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Western); bar; concierge; shopping arcade; salon; room service (11:30am–9:45pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

Hirota Guest House ★★ *Finds* Although it looks rather ordinary from the outside, this guesthouse is actually a reconstructed, 130-year-old former sake brewery, located on a quiet residential street in the heart of the city. It's the home of Hirota Harumi, a retired interpreter/tour guide who speaks perfect English and is happy to impart valuable sightseeing information about the town she knows so well. All the rooms she rents out are tatami style; the cheapest are equipped only with fans (no air-conditioning) and face the front street, which can be noisy, while the most expensive add the comfort of air-conditioning and face the garden. Best of all is the detached, two-story cottage, which is actually a converted *kura* (warehouse) standing in a corner of the garden, with sliding screens that open to the outdoors, bathroom, kitchenette, table with leg wells, and enough room to sleep a family of seven. Japanese breakfasts are served in a pleasant room with a view of the garden.

665 Seimei-cho, Tominokoji-nishi, Nijo Dori, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-0951. ☎ 075/221-2474. Fax 075/221-2627. h-hirota@msi.biglobe.ne.jp. 6 units (none with bathroom), 1 cottage. ¥6,000 – ¥8,500 (\$50–\$71) single; ¥11,000 – ¥14,000 (\$92–\$117) double. Cottage: ¥9,000 (\$75) per person for 2, ¥8,000 (\$67) per person for 3–4, ¥7,000 (\$58) per person for 5–7. Japanese breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra. No credit cards. Subway: Oike Station (exit 1, 12 min.). **Amenities:** Rental bikes (¥1,000/\$8.35 per day); in-room massage; babysitting; dry-cleaning/laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea and coffee.

Hotel Alpha Kyoto This small and unassuming but pleasant brick business hotel has a great, hidden location near the Kawaramachi-Shijo Dori intersection, and I have always found the staff accommodating. Most rooms, including singles, are outfitted with double-size beds, but since the cheapest singles face an inner courtyard and are fairly dark, it may be worthwhile to dish out the extra yen for a brighter room. My favorite rooms are those that overlook a quiet temple and Buddhist cemetery—a fitting view in a town that boasts so many religious structures. The handmade origami crane in each room is a nice touch.

Kawaramachi, Sango-agaru, Nakagyo-ku, Kyoto 604-8006. ☎ 075/241-2000. Fax 075/211-0533. hotel-alpha@joytel.co.jp. 119 units. ¥7,500 – ¥8,500 (\$63–\$71) single; ¥11,800 – ¥15,300 (\$98–\$128) double; ¥12,500 – ¥17,200 (\$104–\$143) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (2 min.). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo (1 min.). Just off Kawaramachi Dori not far from Sanjo Dori; entrance is on a side street called Aneyakoji Dori. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese). *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Kyoto Central Inn As the name implies, this inn is centrally located in the heart of the city, near the intersection of Shijo Dori and Kawaramachi Dori. It resembles a business hotel, but thanks to its great location, about 50% of its guests are tourists, with twins making up the vast majority of its rooms. However, rooms are worn and dated, with the only difference between those in the newer and older wing being that the newer-wing rooms are slightly larger and therefore more expensive. Since those facing the front or side of the building are plagued by traffic noise, ask for a room on a high floor facing the back, where you might have a view over surrounding buildings. Clearly, the best thing this aged hotel has going for it are its prices and its location. You even have to fetch a hot-water pot and tea from the front desk.

Shijo Kawaramachi, Nishi-iru, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto 600-8002. ☎ 075/211-1666. Fax 075/241-2765. 150 units. ¥7,000 – ¥9,000 (\$58–\$75) single; ¥11,000 – ¥13,000 (\$92–\$108) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (1 min.). **Amenities:** In-room massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV.

The Palace Side Hotel ★ *Value* Budget-conscious travelers in the know have been flocking to this modest hotel for more than 3 decades. Although its location just west of the Imperial Palace is not as convenient as my other inexpensive

recommendations in Central Kyoto, it's near a subway line and offers more facilities than most. Rooms resemble those in a dormitory, small with just the basics of a desk too tiny for any serious work, windows that open, and old tiled bathrooms. More expensive twins add a sofa bed, while the most expensive twins have both sofas and kitchenettes. Long-term rates attract many who come to Kyoto to study or work.

Karasuma Shimodachiuri-agaru, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto 602-8011. ☎ 075/415-8887. Fax 075/415-8889. <http://palacesidehotel.co.jp>. 120 units. ¥4,800 – ¥5,800 (\$40–\$48) single; ¥6,500 (\$54) double; ¥7,000 – ¥10,000 (\$58–\$83) twin. Long-term rates available. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Marutamachi (4 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); rental bikes (¥500/\$4.15 per day); coin-operated washers and dryers; communal kitchen. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

EASTERN KYOTO VERY EXPENSIVE

⑧1 **Kinoe** ★ This ryokan is different from my other high-end Japanese inn recommendations in that it's been in operation only half a century and occupies a modern, 10-year-old building. However, there may be room at this inn when more famous establishments are full, and it has an interesting location on the edge of the Gion geisha district. Under the able management of Ms. Chizuyo Miyata, it offers simple but elegant tatami rooms with all the traditional flourishes like shoji screens, sliding paper doors, calligraphy in the tokonoma alcove, and a seating area beside the window. Meals, including Western breakfasts on request, are served in your room. Rates below, based on two persons occupying a room, reflect the seasons, with higher rates charged on weekends and the highest rates in spring and autumn.

Yasui, Higashioji, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto 605-0812. ☎ 075/561-1230. Fax 075/561-8719. info@kinoe.co.jp. 13 units. ¥24,000 – ¥33,000 (\$200–\$275) per person, including 2 meals and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. On Higashioji Dori, south of Yasaka Shrine. Bus: 207 to Higashiyama Yasui (1 min.). Taxi: 10 min. **Amenities:** In-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Seikoro Inn ★★ *Finds* This ryokan just east of the Kamo River was established in 1831, but the present building dates from about a century ago. After passing through a traditional front gate and small courtyard, you'll find yourself in one of the most charming entryways I've seen in Japan, which adjoins a cozy parlor replete with an eclectic mix of Japanese and Western antiques, including an old grandfather clock. The rooms, also decorated in antiques, are very homey and comfortable; some open onto a garden with sliding doors and shoji screens. Rooms in an annex built just before the 1964 Olympics are high enough that you can see over the surrounding rooftops, but most of these don't have garden views so I prefer the ones in the oldest buildings. The owner, who speaks English well, doesn't mind if you take your meals elsewhere, especially if you're going to be here for a while.

Gojo-sagaru, Tonyamachi, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto 605-0907. ☎ 075/561-0771. Fax 075/541-5481. www.seikoro.com. 22 units. ¥25,000 (\$208) double room without meals; ¥25,000 – ¥50,000 (\$208–\$417) per person including 2 meals and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 17 or 205 to Kawaramachi Gojo and then a 5-min. walk; cross the bridge over the Kamo River and after Kawabata Dori take the 1st right. Keihan Electric Railway: Gojo Station (2 min.). *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

EXPENSIVE

The Westin Miyako ★★ ★ *Kids* This is the place to stay if you're looking for a hotel with history. One of the best-known hotels in Japan, the Miyako first opened back in 1890 and boasts a guest list that reads like a Who's Who of visitors to Japan: Douglas Fairbanks, Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Charles and

Princess Diana, Anwar el-Sadat, and Ted Kennedy. Even today, half of the guests staying here are foreigners.

You'd be hard-pressed to find evidence of that history today. Rather, the newly renovated Westin Miyako is like a butterfly finally emerging from a series of past renovating blunders which obliterated all vestiges of its historic past. It is now the most smartly appointed hotel in Kyoto, on par with the best of Tokyo's hotels. In addition, the setting is as good as it gets: The hotel sprawls over more than 6.4 hectares (16 acres) of hilltop at the northeastern end of the city, close to some of Kyoto's most famous temples (and a subway station) and commanding a good view of the surrounding hills. Other pluses include a Japanese garden and a registration satellite at Kyoto Station where you can check in and deposit your bags (they'll be sent onward to your room), leaving you free to explore Kyoto or to take the complimentary bus to the hotel unencumbered by baggage. Families appreciate the day-care center as well as free use of indoor and outdoor pools and one of Japan's best hotel amusement rooms, complete with billiards, video games, Internet connection, board games, air hockey, a play area for toddlers, and more.

Western-style rooms come in a variety of styles and price ranges, with the least expensive rooms occupying the oldest wing and the most expensive featuring updated, modern furnishings. Best of all are rooms on the fifth floor with terraces overlooking the valley. And for those who wish to experience the pleasures of a traditional tatami room but with all the nearby conveniences of a first-rate hotel, the Japanese-style Kasui-en annex is a good bet for ryokan first-timers. Built in 1959, the annex offers 20 modern, elegant rooms with views of a Japanese garden and cypress baths.

Sanjo Keage, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto 605-0052. ☎ **800/WESTIN-1** in the U.S. and Canada or 075/771-7111. Fax 075/751-2490. www.westinmiyako-kyoto.com. 516 units. ¥23,000 – ¥40,000 (\$192–\$333) single or double; from ¥50,000 (\$417) Executive Club floor; ¥35,000 (\$292) double in Kasui-en. AE, DC, MC, V. Free shuttle every 30 min. from Kyoto Station's Hachijo Central exit (9am–6:30pm). Subway: Keage (2 min.). **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; bar; 2 lounges; cafe; 20m (66-ft.) indoor pool; shallow outdoor pool; Jacuzzi, sauna, and gym (free for hotel guests); grass tennis court (¥5,000/\$42 per hour); sun decks (available also for viewing the full moon); observation deck; wild-bird sanctuary and bird-watching trail; jogging trail; tea ceremony room open daily 10am–7pm (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35); day-care center (open daily 10am–9pm; ¥5,000/\$42 for 2 hr.); game room (free); concierge; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day dry-cleaning/laundry; non-smoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Yachiyo Inn ★ Situated on the approach to Nanzenji Temple, this inn attracts a largely foreign clientele. Formerly a villa (it became a ryokan after World War II), the building is about 100 years old but has been remodeled so that parts of it seem almost new. Still, I prefer the 10 rooms here to those in the newer annex, especially the four on the ground floor with sitting alcoves that open onto a small garden. Most rooms have wooden bathtubs along with showers and Western-style toilets, as well as transom carvings and ikebana flower arrangements.

This ryokan doesn't mind if you prefer to take your meals elsewhere. If you're staying in Kyoto for a few days, you might want to first take breakfast and dinner at the ryokan and later start going out to Kyoto's many restaurants. Breakfast (Western style available) is served communally in a pleasant room overlooking a garden and pond, while dinner is served in your room.

34 Nanzenji-Fukujicho, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 605-8435. ☎ **075/771-4148**. Fax 075/771-4140. www.ryokan-yachiyo.com. 20 units (17 with bathroom). ¥30,000 (\$250) double without bathroom; ¥36,000 – ¥50,000 (\$300–\$417) double with bathroom. Rates include 2 meals and service charge; 30% less without meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 5 to Nanzenji-Eikando-michi (2 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Kyoto-style kaiseki). *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Kyoto Gion Hotel This older, simple hotel has no frills but a great location in the heart of Gion, within easy walking distance of the city center, shops, nightlife, and the many sights in Higashiyama-ku. Rooms were renovated in 2001, but the single rooms are still among the smallest I've seen (I'm not sure there's even room to unpack). There's no view to speak of, but I prefer the rooms facing west, which have floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the quaint tiled roofs of Gion (corner rooms are best). A plus is the rooftop beer garden, open in summer.

555 Gion, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto 605-0074. ☎ 075/551-2111. Fax 075/551-2200. www.apahotel.com. 154 units. ¥8,000 (\$67) single; ¥14,000–¥20,000 (\$138–\$146) twin. ¥500 (\$4.15) per person more on Sat and nights before holidays; ¥1,000–¥2,000 (\$8.35–\$17) more per person during spring, autumn, and major holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 100 or 206 to Gion (2 min.). On Shijo Dori beside Starbucks, near Yasaka Shrine. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); bar; beer garden. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Kyoto Park Hotel ★ *Value* Well-located and offering good value for your money, this hotel is a good starting point for strolls through eastern Kyoto (including the pleasant walk to Kiyomizu Temple recommended in “A Stroll Through Higashiyama-ku,” on p. 327). With its stained-glass windows, plants, and statues, it's reminiscent of a European hotel with grounds that include both a rock garden and a garden with a waterfall, cliff, and pond. Rooms, however, could do with a bit of updating, especially the furniture. I'm partial to the twin rooms on the fifth floor, which are larger and boast a balcony overlooking the garden.

644–2 Mawarimachi, Sanju-sangendo, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto 605-0941. ☎ 075/525-3111. Fax 075/553-1101. 268 units. ¥8,500–¥9,500 (\$71–\$79) single; ¥18,000 (\$150) double; ¥15,500–¥36,000 (\$129–\$300) twin. ¥1,000–¥3,000 (\$8.35–\$25) more per person per day on Sat, holidays, festivals, and peak season. Rates include tax and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 100, 206, or 208 to Hakubutsukan Sanjusangendo-mae (1 min.). Across the street from the National Museum and beside Sanjusangendo Hall. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, coffee shop, and Le Grand Rêve [p. 318]); bar; lounge; salon; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

For Women Only

Ladies' Hotel Chorakukan ★★ *Finds* This small, highly recommended, eccentric-looking hotel for women, pleasantly located on the edge of Maruyama Park, is brimming with personality. The interior of the imposing Western-style building, built just after the turn of the 20th century as a private residence, has been modified so much through the decades that the atmosphere is comically bizarre—a thorough mix of grand and gaudy. The lobby, for example, has a chandelier and a high gilded ceiling, but the rest of the room sports plastic moldings and accents. Each guest room is slightly different (though they all seem to have a strange mix of wall coverings) and comes with a sink, one to five beds, and great views of the park. This place would make a great set for a comedy—or an Agatha Christie play.

Maruyama Park, Higashiyama-ku, Kyoto 605-0071. ☎ 075/561-0001. Fax 075/561-0006. 19 units (all with toilet only). ¥5,000 (\$42) single; ¥9,000 (\$75) twin. No credit cards. Bus: 100 or 206 to Gion and then a 7-min. walk, past Yasaka Shrine. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Chorakukan, p. 318); tea lounge. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

NORTHERN KYOTO

INEXPENSIVE

82 **Myorenji Temple** ★★ *Finds* If you don't mind the austerity of life in a temple (early to bed, early to rise), you'll like the tranquillity of this place.

Located northwest of the Horikawa-Ternanouchi intersection in a pleasant, quiet neighborhood, Myorenji Temple was founded more than 700 years ago and is now run by a jolly woman named Chizuko-san, who speaks a little English. Since she manages this place virtually single-handedly, she prefers guests who stay 2 or 3 days and requests that they make reservations at least a week in advance (a month in advance would be even better). The temple buildings, about 200 years old and containing several important cultural properties (including paintings from the Momoyama Period that you can see upon request), are beautifully laid out. Cherry blossoms bloom from October to April, and there's even a rock garden, laid out by the same priest who directed the construction of the gardens of Katsura Imperial Villa. Sleeping is in bare, simple tatami rooms, and since there are no bathing facilities on the temple grounds, you're given a ticket to use the neighborhood bath. Services are held every morning at 6:30am.

Teranouchi Omiya Higashi-iru, Horikawa, Kamigyo-ku, Kyoto 602-8418. 075/451-3527. Fax 075/451-3597. 6 units (none with bathroom). ¥3,800 (\$32) per person. Rates include tax and a ticket for the neighborhood public bath. No credit cards. Bus: 9 to Horikawa Teranouchi stop (5 min.). In room: A/C, hot-water pot with tea (coffee on request), no phone.

Nashinoki Inn ★ *Kids* In a quiet, peaceful neighborhood north of the Kyoto Imperial Palace, this ryokan is run by a warm, friendly older couple who speak some English. Staying here is like living with a Japanese family since the home looks very lived-in and is filled with the personal belongings of a lifetime. Some of the tatami rooms, which feature touches such as vases, Japanese dolls, and pictures, are quite large and adequate for families. Breakfast is served in your room.

Agaru Imadegawa Nashinoki St., Kamikyo-ku, Kyoto 602-0838. 075/241-1543. Fax 075/211-0854. www.nande.com/nashinoki/english.htm. 7 units (none with bathroom). ¥5,000 (\$42) single; ¥8,800 (\$73) double; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple. Japanese or Western breakfast ¥700–¥900 (\$5.85–\$7.50) extra. No credit cards. Subway: Imadegawa Station (7 min. from exit 3); walk past Doshisha University and turn left at Yaomon coffee shop. In room: A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Rakucho ★★ *Finds* This member of the Japanese Inn Group isn't as conveniently situated as most of the other inns listed above, but that shouldn't stop anyone from staying in this well-kept 70-year-old ryokan, managed by English-speaking Kimiko Urade and her son. All but one of the spotless tatami rooms, decorated with such traditional touches as scrolls, have views of a small peaceful garden. Entrance to the ryokan is through a well-tended tiny courtyard filled with plants. There's a computer in the lobby with free Internet access and an international phone, as well as two communal refrigerators, a toaster, a microwave, and free instant coffee.

67 Higashihangi-cho, Shimogamo, Sakyo-ku, Kyoto 606-0824. 075/721-2174. Fax 075/791-7202. www.rakucho-ryokan.com. 8 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,500–¥5,000 (\$38–\$42) single; ¥8,000–¥8,800 (\$67–\$73) double; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple. MC, V. Subway: Kitaoji Station (10 min.); walk east on Kitaoji Dori and turn left at the 5th traffic light. Bus: 205 to Furitsudaigaku-mae (2 min.; turn north at the post office). Amenities: Coin-op washers and dryers; lobby computer with free Internet access; communal kitchenette. In room: A/C, hot-water pot and tea.

4 Where to Dine in Kyoto

Kyoto cuisine, known as *Kyo-ryori*, is linked to Kyoto's long history and to seasonal foods produced in the surrounding region. Among the various types of Kyo-ryori available, most famous are probably the vegetarian dishes, which were created to serve the needs of Zen Buddhist priests and pilgrims making the rounds of Kyoto's many temples. Called *shojin ryori*, these vegetarian set meals

may include tofu simmered in a pot at your table (*yudofu*), filmy sheets of soy milk curd (*yuba*), and an array of local vegetables. Kyoto is also renowned for its own style of kaiseki (*Kyo-kaiseki*), originally conceived as a meal to be taken before the tea ceremony but eventually becoming an elaborate feast enjoyed by the capital's nobility with its blend of ceremonial court cuisine, Zen vegetarian food, and simple tea-ceremony dishes. Today, Kyoto abounds in restaurants serving both vegetarian tofu dishes and kaiseki meals fit for an emperor (Kyoto's better ryokan also serve kaiseki as the evening meal). Simpler restaurants specialize in *Obanzai*, home-style Kyoto cooking using traditional seasonal ingredients. Otherwise, any restaurant advertising that it serves *Kyo-ryori* generally offers a variety of Kyoto specialties. For more on kaiseki and other Japanese-style meals, see "Tips on Dining, Japanese Style," beginning on p. 69.

Remember: Last orders are taken 30 to 60 minutes before the restaurant's actual closing time, even earlier for some kaiseki restaurants (which often require a reservation). Bus information to each restaurant is from Kyoto Station.

AROUND KYOTO STATION

In addition to the restaurants listed here, a good place for inexpensive dining is **Kyoto Station**, which houses approximately 70 restaurants in underground arcades, at major exits, in a 10th-floor food court, at Isetan department store, and at Hotel Granvia.

EXPENSIVE

Top of Kyoto ★ CONTINENTAL Kyoto's only revolving restaurant, located on the 14th floor of the Rihga Royal Hotel, is a good choice for a romantic dinner. Unlike most other revolving restaurants in Japan, which usually move so fast that you fear being flung against the windows by centrifugal force, this one, I'm happy to report, takes a leisurely 90 minutes to revolve, affording excellent views over the tops of Kyoto's temples to the mountains surrounding the city. With a smart Italian marble decor, it offers a seasonal menu that may include steamed lobster with vegetables and herb sauce, sautéed veal with Italian sauce, and Japanese tenderloin steak with truffle sauce, with most entrees available in small and large portions.

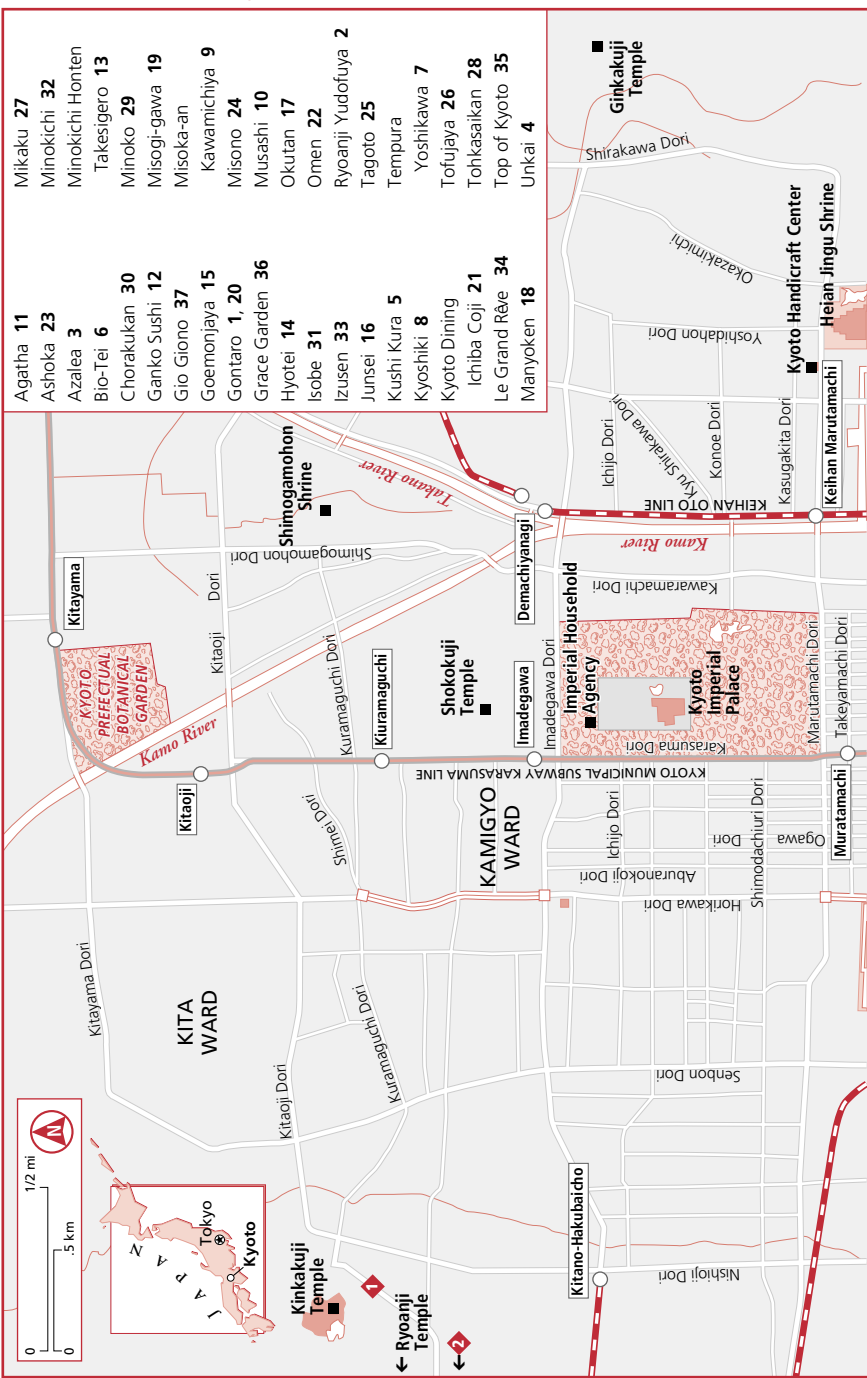
Rihga Royal Hotel, Horikawa-Shiokoji. ☎ 075/341-2311. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥2,100–¥8,000 (\$18–\$67); set lunches ¥2,000–¥5,000 (\$17–\$42); set dinners ¥5,000–¥12,000 (\$42–\$100). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9:30pm (last order). Free shuttle bus every 10 min. until 9pm from Kyoto Station's Hachijo (south) exit (turn left out of the station and walk to the end of the parking lot, past McDonald's), or a 7-min. walk west of Kyoto Station to the Horikawa-Shiokoji intersection.

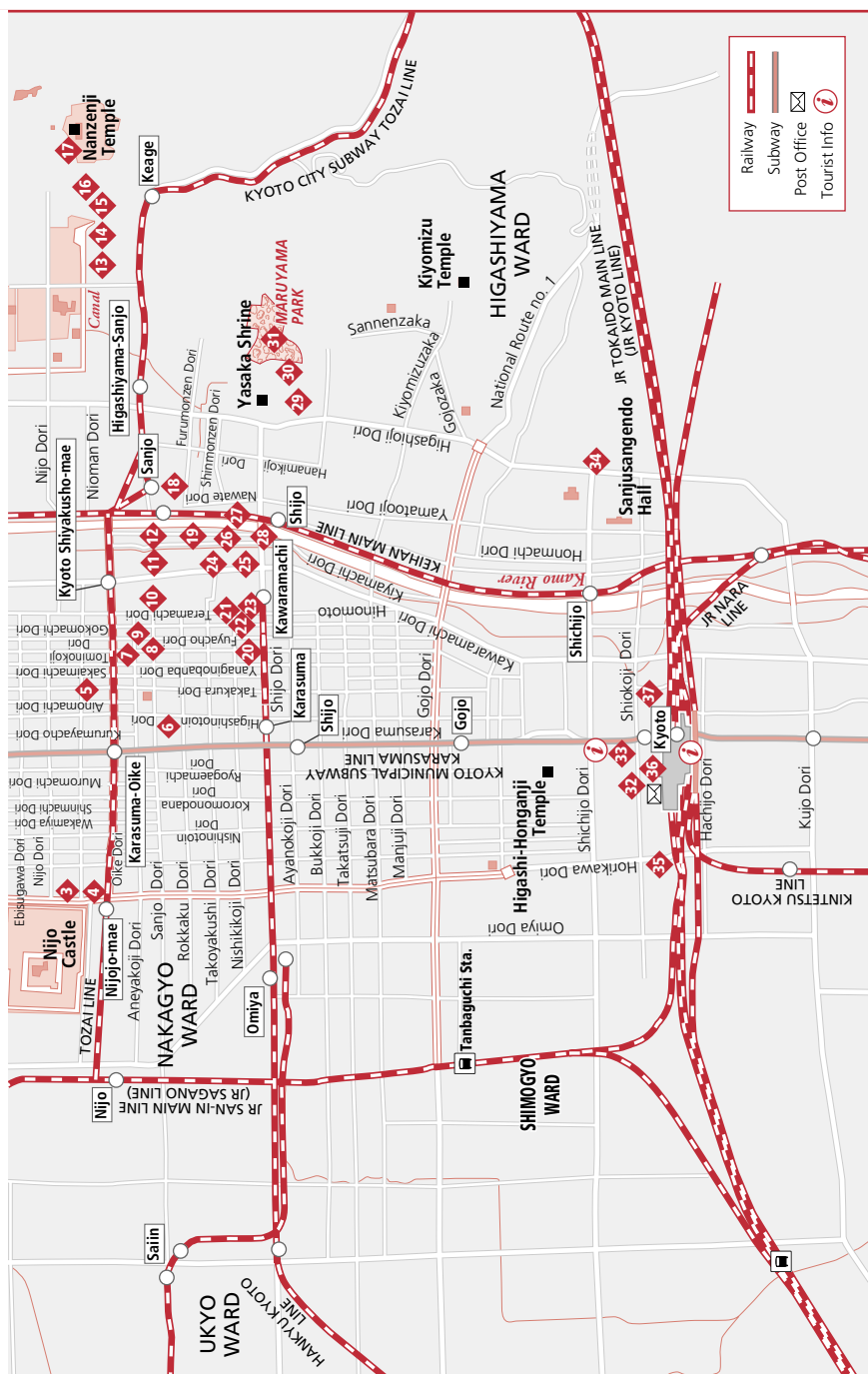
MODERATE

Grace Garden ★ CONTINENTAL This smart-looking restaurant is trendier and more upbeat than most hotel restaurants that specialize in buffets (which tend toward the utilitarian) and is also smaller, with fewer than 100 seats. Bright and airy with large windows overlooking southern Kyoto, warm woods and peach-colored decor that give it an earthy glow, and an open kitchen, it offers a little of everything from its plentiful buffet spreads. All-you-can-drink deals are available starting at ¥1,500 (\$13), and luckily for the less discerning among us, they come with a 1½-hour time limit. After dinner, retire to the Southern Court cocktail lounge on the same floor, which offers the same view over Kyoto and live piano music (best of all, there's no cover or music charge).

15th floor, Hotel Granvia Kyoto, Kyoto Station. ☎ 075/342-5522. Buffet dinner ¥3,500 (\$29); buffet lunch ¥2,200 (\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–9:30pm. Above Kyoto Station.

Where to Dine in Kyoto





Minokichi ★★ (Value) KYO-KAISEKI/KYO-RYORI A branch of the famous Minokichi restaurant first established in Kyoto 280 years ago, this place is designed to resemble a lane in a typical traditional Japanese village; waitresses are dressed in kimono and Japanese music plays in the background to help set the mood. The menu includes Kyo-kaiseki cuisine and typical Kyoto dishes, as well as such Japanese favorites as obento lunch boxes and eel. Set lunches, served daily until 2pm, are especially good bargains, featuring everything from eel to mini-kaiseki.

Hotel New Hankyu Kyoto, Shiokoji Dori. ☎ 075/343-5300. Reservations recommended. Set meals ¥3,800 – ¥10,000 (\$32–\$83); set lunches ¥1,800 – ¥3,000 (\$15–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–9pm. Across the street from Kyoto Station's Karasuma (north) Central exit.

INEXPENSIVE

Gio Giono ITALIAN The modern, gray-striped Renaissance Building next to Kyoto Station features several restaurants, including a coffee shop, a Chinese restaurant, and a Japanese restaurant. Best for a Western meal is this informal Italian restaurant on the second floor serving pizza, pasta, and such main dishes as sautéed scallops, tuna with tomato and capers, and grilled veal with vegetables and mozzarella. An especially good deal is the ¥900 (\$7.50) set lunch, available until 2:30pm and offering a choice of daily pasta or pizza, along with salad, a dessert buffet, and coffee.

Renaissance Building, 2nd floor, 849 Higashi Shiokoji-cho. ☎ 075/365-0202. Pasta and pizza ¥1,100 – ¥1,800 (\$9.15–\$15); meat dishes ¥2,100 – ¥2,800 (\$18–\$23); set lunches ¥950 and ¥2,000 (\$7.90 and \$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm (last order). On Shiokoji Dori; turn right out of Kyoto Station's Karasuma (north) Central exit and walk 1 min. east.

83 **Izusen** ★★ KYO-RYORI/VEGETARIAN Although located in a nondescript building and decorated very simply, this is one of my favorite restaurants in Kyoto for inexpensive Japanese fare. The food, which features local and vegetarian dishes, is delicious and beautifully presented. There's an English-language menu as well as a plastic-food display, and seating is either at tables or on tatami mats. You can choose from a variety of fixed-price meals offering soup, appetizer, rice, a main dish, and side dishes. A vegetarian meal for ¥1,800 (\$15), for example, is the kind of light meal usually served at a tea ceremony. I opt for the Hana course (¥2,700/\$23), which features seasonal Kyoto cuisine, including tempura, sashimi, various vegetables, broiled fish, rice, and soup.

Surugaiya Building, 2nd floor, Karasuma Shichijo Dori-sagaru. ☎ 075/343-4211. Set meals ¥1,800 – ¥4,000 (\$15–\$33). No credit cards. Daily 11am–8pm. On Karasuma Dori between the Tourist Information Center and Kintetsu department store and above a McDonald's, a 1-min. walk from Kyoto Station's Karasuma (north) Central exit.

CENTRAL KYOTO

The heart of Kyoto's shopping, dining, and nightlife district is Nakagyo-ku, especially on Kawaramachi and Shijo Dori and along the many side streets. In summer, restaurants on the west bank of the Kamo River erect large wooden outdoor platforms that extend over the water and offer open-air dining. For a cup of coffee, head to **Starbucks**, located on the corner of Shijo Dori and Yanaginobanba (☎ 075/231-5008).

EXPENSIVE

84 **Misogi-gawa** ★★ (Finds) FRENCH KAISEKI Dining here could well be the culinary highlight of your trip. For more than 20 years—long before fusion cuisine burst onto the scene—this lovely and exclusive restaurant has been

serving nouvelle French cuisine that utilizes the best of Japanese style and ingredients in what could be called French kaiseki. It's located on narrow Pontocho, which parallels the Kamo River and is one of Kyoto's most famous nightlife districts, in a century-old renovated wooden building that once belonged to a geisha. Dishes are the creations of owner/master-chef Teruo Inoue, who trained in Paris and successfully blends the two cuisines into dishes that are arranged like a work of art and served on Japanese tableware. Although four set meals are offered, diners are often asked for their preferences and dislikes, with favorite foods incorporated into at least one dish. The dining experience is enhanced by an English-speaking staff, who explain the ingredients of each dish as it's presented, and by an extensive wine list, culled from Inoue's annual visits to France. Seating options include a U-shaped counter with tatami seating and leg wells, another informal counter for customers who prefer to order a la carte dishes (written in French and changing regularly), private tatami rooms, and my favorite, an outdoor summer veranda overlooking the river. This is a great place for a splurge.

Sanjo-sagaru, Pontocho. ☎ 075/221-2270. Reservations required. Set dinners ¥12,000–¥30,000 (\$100–\$250). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11:30am–2pm (last order) and 5:30–8:30pm (last order). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo (5 min.); on Pontocho, north of the playground.

Misono ★ TEPPANYAKI This is a branch of the famous Kobe restaurant, which claims to have invented teppanyaki. You can bet that with a reputation like that, it will live up to its good name. Your waiter prepares your meal in front of you (though with less fanfare than in other teppanyaki places) in a comfortable, dark wood–wainscoted room with a city view. If you're on a budget, come for the ¥1,500 (\$13) set lunch, which includes steak, rice, and soup, or the special "tourist menu" for ¥3,000 to ¥5,000 (\$25–\$42) that includes Kobe beef and side dishes. There's an English-language menu.

TSC Tower, 5th floor, Takoyakushi, Kawaramachi. ☎ 075/255-2981. Set dinners ¥8,000–¥22,000 (\$67–\$183); set lunches ¥1,500–¥7,500 (\$13–\$63). AE, DC, MC, V. Wed–Mon 11:30am–3pm and 5–9:30pm (last order). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (1 min.). On the east side of Kawaramachi Dori just south of Maruzen bookstore and Takoyakushi St.

Tempura Yoshikawa ★★ TEMPURA If you're hungering for tempura, this restaurant has a sign in English and is easy to find. Located in an old-fashioned part of Kyoto that boasts a number of expensive ryokan, it's a tiny, intimate place with a traditional atmosphere. The tempura counter seats only 12 and offers tempura lunches beginning at ¥2,000 (\$17) and dinners beginning at ¥6,000 (\$50). Meals in tatami rooms, with views of a garden, are more expensive, with tempura lunches beginning at ¥6,000 (\$50), tempura dinners beginning at ¥12,000 (\$100), and Kyo-kaiseki meals costing ¥20,000 (\$167).

Tominokoji Dori, Oike-sagaru. ☎ 075/221-5544. Reservations required. Set dinners ¥6,000–¥20,000 (\$50–\$167); set lunches ¥2,000–¥6,000 (\$17–\$50). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–1:30pm and 5–8:30pm (last order). Counter seating closed Sun. Subway: Karasuma Oike Station (6 min.). On Tominokoji St. just south of Oike Dori.

Unkai ★ KAISEKI/SHABU-SHABU/VEGETARIAN A convenient place for a meal if you're visiting Nijo Castle (across the street), Unkai has a modern and refined decor, floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking greenery, and kimono-clad waitresses. The English-language menu has photos illustrating shabu-shabu, kaiseki, tempura, and *shojin ryori* (a vegetarian set meal typical of Kyoto). The ¥5,000 (\$42) Miyako Course is the one most often recommended for foreigners and includes an appetizer, sashimi, custard, grilled fish, tempura, miso soup, and rice.

ANA Hotel Kyoto, Nijojo-mae, Horikawa Dori. ☎ 075/231-1155. Set dinners ¥4,800–¥8,000 (\$40–\$67); set lunches ¥2,000–¥8,000 (\$17–\$60). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–10pm. Subway: Nijojo-mae (1 min.). Bus: 9, 50, or 101 to Nijojo-mae. On Horikawa Dori across from Nijo Castle's main entrance.

MODERATE

Agatha ★★ KUSHIYAKI Soothing jazz, modern decor, excellent food, and an enthusiastic, English-speaking staff make this a good choice in the heart of the city. Its namesake is none other than that great dame of mystery writers, with many set meals named after Agatha Christie characters. There are also more than 50 different kinds of skewered food, grilled over charcoal, available from the English-language menu, including such yummys as Kyoto chicken with garlic butter, baby eggplant, cheese and salami kabob, scallop wrapped in bacon, and chicken with plum sauce. Wash it all down with Agatha's original sake. The snack charge, by the way, is waived if you order a set meal.

Kawaramachi-aneyakoji Higashi-iru, Nakagyo-ku. ☎ 075/223-2379. Skewers ¥730 (\$6.10); set meals ¥2,400–¥5,500 (\$20–\$46). Snack charge ¥400 (\$3.35). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm (last order). Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (2 min.). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo. East of Kawaramachi, on the south side of Aneya-koji (2 streets north of Sanjo).

Ashoka ★ INDIAN One of Kyoto's most popular Indian restaurants, in business about 20 years, serves vegetarian and meat curries prepared by Indian chefs, including mutton, chicken, fish, vegetable, and shrimp selections, as well as tandoori. I started my meal here with mulligatawny Madras, a South Indian soup, and followed it with Indian bread stuffed with minced meat along with mutton *sagwala* (mutton and spinach).

Kikusui Building, 3rd floor, Teramachi Dori. ☎ 075/241-1318. Main dishes ¥1,400–¥2,200 (\$12–\$18); set dinners ¥3,000–¥5,800 (\$25–\$48); set lunches ¥900–¥2,000 (\$7.50–\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9pm (last order); Sun and holidays 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–8:30pm. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (1 min.). Just north of Shijo Dori, to the right at the entrance of the Teramachi covered shopping arcade.

Azalea CONTINENTAL Azalea is a pleasant place for a casual Western meal if you're visiting nearby Nijo Castle. Offering an English-language menu and a view of its small, Japanese landscaped garden, it has inexpensive set lunches that may include a pasta or risotto dish as the main course, along with a la carte selections like club sandwiches, beef curry rice, or sautéed lobster priced from ¥1,300 to ¥2,500 (\$11–\$21). Dinner entrees include grilled scallops, steaks, and heavier fare, with prices beginning at ¥2,000 (\$17). Obviously, at these prices you can't expect perfection, but the setting is nice and it's easy to find.

International Hotel Kyoto, Nijojo-mae, Horikawa Dori. ☎ 075/222-1111. Set dinners ¥2,500–¥7,000 (\$21–\$58); set lunches ¥1,300–¥3,500 (\$11–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9pm. Subway: Nijojo-mae (2 min.). Bus: 9, 50, or 101 to Nijojo-mae. On Horikawa Dori across from Nijo Castle's main entrance.

⑧5 **Kushi Kura** YAKITORI Housed in a 100-year-old warehouse with heavy-beamed, dark-polished wood and whitewashed walls, this yakitori-ya serves specially raised chicken grilled over top-grade charcoal, with an English-language menu offering various set meals and a la carte selections. You can watch the action while you're comfortably seated at the counter with its leg wells. A large selection of sake (including the local Fushimi brew) adds to the great atmosphere here.

Takakura Dori, Oike-agaru ☎ 075/213-2211. Yakitori set meals ¥2,500–¥3,500 (\$21–\$29); yakitori skewers ¥300–¥480 (\$2.50–\$4). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Subway: Karasuma-Oike (2 min.). Just north of Oike Dori.

Kyoshiki ★ KAISEKI/KYO-RYORI This reasonably priced kaiseki restaurant was converted from a Meiji-Era private home more than 20 years ago. I recommend the Hisago obento for ¥3,000 (\$25) offered on the English-language menu. It consists of a variety of seasonal foods served in individual dishes that stack neatly on top of one another to form a gourd; you take the bowls apart to eat. The atmosphere here is relaxed and comfortable, with both tatami and table seating. Fuyacho Dori, Sanjo-agaru (just north of Sanjo Dori). ☎ 075/221-4840. Set meals ¥3,000–¥10,000 (\$25–\$83); set lunches ¥3,000–¥3,300 (\$25–\$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11:40am–2pm and 5–8:30pm (last order). Bus: 5 to Shijo-Fuyacho (1 min.). On Fuyacho Dori, just north of Sanjo Dori.

(86) **Tagoto** ★ KYO-RYORI/KAISEKI/OBENTO Nestled in an inner courtyard off busy Shijo Dori and offering a peaceful retreat in the heart of downtown Kyoto, this restaurant has been serving a variety of Japanese dishes at moderate prices since 1868. The English-language menu (with photos) includes Kyo-ryori set meals, tempura, obento lunch boxes, seasonal kaiseki courses, and *yuba* (a low-calorie curd made from soy milk). Seating is either at tables or on tatami.

Shijo-Kawaramachi, Nishi-iru, Kitagawa. ☎ 075/221-1811. Set meals ¥3,000–¥10,000 (\$25–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–8:30pm (last order). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (1 min.). The entrance is off Sanjo Dori just west of Kawaramachi, near the Kyoto Central Inn (look for a tiny door with a white sign; step through it and follow the passageway to the back courtyard).

(87) **Tofujaya** Finds TOFU After inheriting a tofu shop, owner Hamano-san opened this small, casual restaurant to promote tofu's nutritious qualities. Look for a tiny tofu shop on narrow Pontocho; the entrance to the second-floor restaurant is around the corner to the right. The restaurant, with room for only a dozen or so diners, has an open kitchen and an English-language menu listing *dengaku* (broiled tofu with a miso coating), fried tofu, sesame tofu, and other dishes priced under ¥900 (\$7.50). It's easiest, however, to order one of the tofu kaiseki courses, which come with a variety of tofu and side dishes. You'll probably feel healthy after eating here.

Shijo-agaru, Pontocho. ☎ 075/212-7706. Reservations required. Set courses ¥3,000–¥4,500 (\$25–\$38); set lunches ¥1,800–¥2,500 (\$15–\$21). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm (until 9:30pm Sat–Sun and holidays). Closed some Tues. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (4 min.). On Pontocho's western side about halfway between Shijo and Sanjo sts. (north of the playground and opposite Hunan Restaurant).

INEXPENSIVE

(88) **Bio-Tei** VEGETARIAN/HEALTH FOOD If you're yearning for a meal in a health-food restaurant, head to this very informal second-floor restaurant down the street from the Museum of Kyoto and catty-corner from the post office. Using organic, preservative-free ingredients, it serves only one thing at lunch: a great teishoku. Last time I was there it came with *genmae* (brown rice), salad, miso soup, pickles, and a curry-based tofu stew with potatoes and carrots. For dinner, a set meal and vegetarian à la carte dishes are offered from a Japanese menu. Seating is at sturdy wooden tables hewn from Japanese cypress, and meals are served on tableware from local kilns. As befits a health-food restaurant, smoking is not allowed.

Sanjo Dori Higashinotoin. ☎ 075/255-0086. Lunch teishoku ¥800 (\$6.65); set dinner ¥1,200 (\$10); dinner main courses ¥650–¥750 (\$5.40–\$6.25). No credit cards. Tues–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Tues–Wed and Fri–Sat 5–8:30pm (last order). Closed holidays. Subway: Karasuma-Oike (exit 5, 3 min.). On the southwest corner of Sanjo-Higashinotoin intersection on the 2nd floor.

⑧9 **Ganko Sushi** SUSHI This popular, lively sushi restaurant offers the usual raw fish selections, as well as such items as grilled yakitori and kushikatsu, shabu-shabu, tempura, tofu (ranging from fried to grilled), and shrimp or crab dishes on an English-language menu. Behind the sushi counter is a fish tank with some rather large specimens swimming around happily until their numbers come up. On the second floor is a robata-yaki restaurant that is popular with office workers after work; an English-language menu here lists grilled vegetables and meats.

Kawaramachi-Sanjo, Higashi-iru. ☎ 075/255-1128. Sushi a la carte ¥50–¥780 (40¢–\$6.35); set meals ¥1,000–¥2,580 (\$8.35–\$22). MC, V. 1st floor daily 11:30am–10pm; 2nd floor daily 4:30–10pm. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (4 min.). Bus: 4, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo (2 min.). On Sanjo Dori just west of the Kamo River (look for its logo of a face with glasses and a bandanna).

⑨0 **Gontaro** NOODLES This noodle shop has been serving its own hand-made noodles for a mere 70-some years. A small place with a modern yet traditional interior and an English-language menu, it offers various noodle dishes of either *soba* (buckwheat) or *udon* (a thicker, wheat noodle) with such toppings as tempura, as well as *donburi* (a rice casserole with tempura, yakitori, or other topping) and *nabe* (udon boiled in broth with seafood, chicken, and vegetables). Those with insatiable appetites should have it all with the Okimori set meal for ¥5,500 (\$46) which comes with nabe, tempura, barbecue chicken, and noodles. Fuyacho Dori, Shijo-agaru. ☎ 075/221-5810. Noodles ¥700–¥1,300 (\$5.85–\$11); donburi ¥1,200–¥1,350 (\$10–\$11); nabe ¥3,800 (\$32). No credit cards. Thurs–Tues 11am–10pm. Bus: 5 to Shijo-Fuyacho (1 min.). On the west side of Fuyacho Dori just north of Shijo Dori; look for a tiny recessed courtyard, white curtains, and a lone pine tree.

Kyoto Dining Ichiba Coji ★ *Value* ASIAN It's difficult to classify this hip place, which offers a variety of fixed-price meals in an unusual setting of bare concrete walls and an elevated dining platform above a running stream. Set lunches may include seafood fried noodles Thai style, along with a side dish like deep-fried tofu, or perhaps grilled fish or kushi katsu. However, no English-language menu is available for dinner, so look at what others around you are eating, take a gamble on one of the set meals, and make it go down easier by adding the all-you-can drink option to your meal for ¥1,200 (\$10), for which there's a 90-minute time limit.

Withyou Building, Teramachi, Shijo-agaru. ☎ 075/252-2008. Set lunches ¥900 (\$7.50); set dinners ¥2,000–¥3,000 (\$17–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–3pm and 5–10:15pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–10:15pm (last order). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (3 min.). On the west side of the Teramachi covered shopping arcade just north of Nishikikoji Dori in the basement of the Withyou Building.

Misoka-An Kawamichiya ★★ NOODLES Charming and delightful with a central courtyard and cubbyhole rooms, this tiny, 300-year-old noodle shop makes a great place for an inexpensive meal in the heart of traditional Kyoto. It offers plain buckwheat noodles as well as noodles with such adornments as tempura and chicken and onions. Its specialty is a one-pot noodle dish called *hokoro*, which includes chicken, yuba, mushrooms, and vegetables for two. There's an English-language menu.

Fuyacho Dori, Sanjo-agaru. ☎ 075/221-2525. Noodles ¥550–¥1,380 (\$4.60–\$12); hokoro ¥7,600 (\$63) for 2 people. AE, DC, MC, V. Fri–Wed 11am–8pm. Bus: 5 to Shijo-Fuyacho (2 min.). On the west side of Fuyacho Dori just north of Sanjo Dori.

⑨1 **Musashi** *Value* SUSHI For a cheap meal of raw fish, this conveniently located restaurant can't be beat. Morsels of sushi ranging from tuna to octopus

are served via a conveyor belt that moves plates along the counter; reach out and take whatever strikes your fancy. Sushi is priced at ¥120 (\$1) a plate. Takeout sushi is also available from the sidewalk front counter.

On the northwest corner of the Kawaramachi-Sanjo intersection. ☎ 075/222-0634. ¥120 (\$1) per plate. No credit cards. Daily 11am–9:40pm (last order). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo (1 min.).

⑨2 **Omen** UDON A casual atmosphere and healthy food at reasonable prices make this tiny place popular. Vegetable udon (*omen*) is the specialty, and the house's traditional style is to serve the wheat noodles in a flat wooden bowl, the sauce in a pottery bowl, the vegetables delicately arranged (sushi style) on a handmade platter with a bowl of sesame seeds alongside. You dip and mix yourself, unlike at other udon shops where it all arrives like a stew swimming in one bowl. Tempura, lightly fried tofu, and *kamonasu dengaku* (fried eggplant topped with a rich miso sauce) are among the other dishes offered on the English-language menu. Another branch is located just south of Ginkakuji (☎ 075/771-8994); there's also one in New York.

Gokomachi Dori, Shijo-agaru. ☎ 075/255-2125. Main dishes ¥600–¥1,000 (\$5–\$8.35); set meal ¥1,500 (\$13). No credit cards. Fri and Mon–Wed 11:30am–3:30pm and 4:30–10pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–10pm. Subway: Shijo (5 min.). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (3 min.). On the east (right) side of Gokomachi Dori, just north of Shijo.

Tohkaikan BEIJING CHINESE This Beijing-style Chinese restaurant, which is popular with families, started life as a Western restaurant. The old building features an ancient, manually operated elevator, lots of wood paneling, high ceilings, old-fashioned decor, and a friendly staff. From June to mid-September, you can sit outside on a wooden veranda over the Kamo River, one of the cheapest places along the river to do so. If it's winter or raining, consider sitting in the fifth-floor dining room, which has nice views of the city. The best views, however, are from the rooftop garden (open in summer), where you can order mugs of beer and dine on dishes from the extensive English-language menu, including sweet-and-sour pork, cooked shrimp with arrowroot, and chicken and green pepper. The second floor is reserved for groups of two or more ordering set courses. The service tends to be slow and I've had better Chinese food, but the atmosphere is great and is reminiscent of another era.

Nishizume, Shijo Ohashi. ☎ 075/221-1147. Main dishes ¥1,300–¥2,500 (\$11–\$21); set meals ¥5,000–¥10,000 (\$42–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–9pm (last order). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (2 min.). On Shijo Dori just west of the bridge spanning the Kamo River in a large yellow stone building.

EASTERN KYOTO

In addition to the restaurants discussed below, there are a lot of informal and inexpensive places near **Kiyomizu Temple** (p. 324). If the weather is nice, you may wish to stop for noodles and a beer on the Kiyomizu Temple grounds, where you'll find several open-air tatami pavilions.

EXPENSIVE

⑨3 **Hyotei** ★★☆☆ *Finds* KAISEKI/OBENTO This 300-year-old restaurant first opened its doors as a teahouse to serve pilgrims and visitors on their way to Nanzenji Temple. Today it consists of two parts: one offering expensive Kyo-kaiseki, which originated with the tea ceremony but is now associated with Kyoto cooking, and an annex offering seasonal obento lunch boxes. The kaiseki meals are served in separate tiny houses situated around a beautiful garden with a pond, maple trees, and bushes; the oldest house, which resembles a small

teahouse, is more than 3 centuries old. You'll dine seated on a tatami floor in a private room, the food brought to you by kimono-clad women. The annex (*bekkan*), to the left of the kaiseki restaurant and with its own entrance, serves delicious lunch boxes (Shokado Bento), which change with the season and are served in a communal tatami room with views of a garden. It also serves a seasonal breakfast: For the cold winter months (Dec–Mar), the ¥10,000 (\$83) Uzuragayu set breakfast, served until 11am, warms the body and soul with a quail rice gruel, grilled skewers, sashimi, soup, and other dishes, while the ¥4,000 (\$33) Asagayu, served until 10am in summer (July–Aug), features lighter fare, including a rice porridge.

35 Kusakawa-cho, Nanzenji. ☎ 075/771-4116. Reservations required for kaiseki, recommended for obento. Kaiseki lunches from ¥18,000 (\$150), dinners from ¥20,000 (\$167); obento lunch boxes ¥4,000 (\$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Kaiseki daily 11am–7:30pm; closed the 2nd and 4th Tues of each month. Shokado Bento Mar–Nov Fri–Wed 8am–4pm, Dec–Feb Fri–Wed 9am–5pm. Subway: Keage (5 min.). Bus: 5 or 100 to Dobutsuen-mae (3 min). West of Shirakawa Dori and south of Murin-an; look for a plain facade hidden behind a bamboo fence with a sign shaped like a gourd.

94 **Manyoken** ★ FRENCH Kyoto's first fully Western-style restaurant, Manyoken remains one of Kyoto's best known, with more than 90 years of experience serving traditional French cuisine. Newly ensconced in Gion on a street flanked by traditional geisha houses, it sports a wooden facade but a modern, elegant interior. The menu changes monthly, but a typical meal may start out with escargot in bourguignon sauce or an eggplant and goose-liver gratin, followed by onion soup, beef filet with morels, and then baked Alaska or soufflé in Curaçao or chocolate.

48-Motoyoshi-cho, Yamato Oujii Shinbashi. ☎ 075/525-5101. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥3,600 – ¥7,200 (\$30–\$60); set dinner ¥8,000 – ¥15,000 (\$67–\$125); set lunch ¥5,000 (\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues noon–2pm and 5–9pm (last order). Bus: 100 or 206 to Gion (4 min). North of Shijo Dori, on Shim-bashi St.

95 **Mikaku** ★ JAPANESE STEAKHOUSE Established almost a century ago by the present owner's grandfather, this restaurant, in the heart of Gion, is housed in a 100-year-old renovated building that was once a private home. The house specialty is an *aburayaki* meal, which consists of beef filet cooked with various vegetables and seasoned with soy sauce and wine. Sukiyaki, *mizudaki* (similar to shabu-shabu but stronger in taste), and teppanyaki are also available from the English-language menu. If you order sukiyaki or mizudaki, you'll sit in a private tatami room on the second floor; if you order teppanyaki, seating is at a counter where the chef (the first female teppanyaki chef we've seen) will prepare your food in front of you on a hot griddle. Outside the window is a pleasant view of the Shirakawa River.

Nawate Dori, Shijo-agaru, Gion. ☎ 075/525-1129. Reservations recommended. Steak and shabu-shabu meals ¥8,000 – ¥15,000 (\$67–\$125); set lunch ¥2,500 – ¥3,000 (\$21–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–1:30pm and 5–9pm (last order). Bus: 100 or 206 to Gion (5 min.) or 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (5 min.). From Shijo Dori, go 1 block north on Nawate Dori and take the 1st left.

Minokichi Honten Takesigero ★ KYO-KAISEKI One of Japan's best-known restaurants for Kyoto cuisine, Minokichi was founded in 1719 as one of eight restaurants licensed to serve freshwater fish and is now in its 10th generation of restaurateurs. With several branches in Japan, including a handful in Kyoto, Osaka, and Tokyo, this flagship restaurant consists of various dining venues in several buildings, including a 200-year-old thatched-roof farmhouse

and an elegantly simple modern building reminiscent of tea-ceremony rooms, all with magnificent views of a graceful bamboo garden. The specialty is Kyoto-style kaiseki (*Kyo-kaiseki*); emphasis is on the appearance of the food, and great care is given to the selection and preparation of seasonal ingredients. Although the dishes themselves change, a kaiseki meal here always consists of 10 items: appetizer, raw fish, soup, food cooked in delicate broth, steamed food, broiled food, deep-fried food, vinegared food, fruit, and green tea with a sweet.

65 Torii-cho, Awataguchi (Sanjo-agaru, Dobutsuen-mae Dori). ☎ 075/771-4185. Reservations required for dinner, recommended for lunch. Kyo-kaiseki dinner ¥15,000–¥30,000 (\$125–\$250); kaiseki lunch ¥7,000–¥15,000 (\$58–\$125). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–7:30pm (last order). Subway: Keage (10 min.). North of Sanjo Dori (Sanjo-agaru) on the road to the Zoological Gardens (Dobutsuen-mae Dori).

96 **Minoko** ★★☆☆ KAISEKI/OBENTO This former villa is an enclave of traditional Japan with a simple, austere exterior and an interior of winding wooden corridors, tatami rooms, and a garden. Opened about 70 years ago by the present owner's father, Minoko does its best to retain the spirit of the tea ceremony, specializing in an elaborate kind of kaiseki dinner called *cha-kaiseki*, usually served at tea-ceremony gatherings and utilizing seasonal ingredients that are beautifully arranged to please both the palate and the eye. If you come for dinner, when only kaiseki is served, you'll eat in a private tatami room. Lunch, which is served communally in a large tatami room with a view of a beautiful garden, is more economical and less formal but still draws on the tea ceremony for inspiration. The obento lunch box, for example, called *chabako-bento*, is named after the lacquered box it's served in, which is traditionally used to carry tea utensils to outdoor tea ceremonies. A *hiru-kaiseki*, or mini-kaiseki set meal, is also available at lunch.

480 Kiyoi-cho, Shimogawara-dori, Gion. ☎ 075/561-0328. Reservations recommended for lunch, required for dinner. Kaiseki ¥13,000 (\$108); mini-kaiseki lunch ¥10,000 (\$83); obento lunch box ¥4,500–¥6,000 (\$38–\$50). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–10pm (last order 8pm). Closed irregularly 3 days a month. Bus: 100 or 206 to Gion (3 min.). A short walk south of Yasaka Shrine.

MODERATE

97 **Isobe** ★ KAISEKI/VARIED JAPANESE A convenient place to stop for lunch if you're walking from Kiyomizu Temple to Gion, this modern, pleasant restaurant offers a nice view of Maruyama Park from its dining room and has an English-language menu with photos listing a variety of set meals featuring sashimi, tempura, and kaiseki.

Maruyama Park, Ikenohata. ☎ 075/561-2216. Set meal ¥3,000–¥8,000 (\$25–\$67). MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Bus: 100 or 206 to Gion (10 min.). On the southeastern edge of the park (if you're walking from Kiyomizu, take a right at the park entrance; if you're coming from Gion, walk past Yasaka Shrine and keep to the right); look for the outdoor red umbrella (up only in dry weather but also depicted on the sign).

Junsei ★ TOFU/KAISEKI/OBENTO Specializing in tofu dishes, Junsei opened in 1961, but the grounds and garden were originally part of a medical school established in the 1830s during the shogun era. Although tourist-oriented and popular with tour groups, the food is good and an English-language menu makes ordering easy. There are several buildings spread throughout the grounds, and what you want determines where you go; as soon as you arrive, you'll be given a menu and asked what you'll be eating. I chose the house specialty, a *yudofu* (tofu) set meal, and was directed to an older building with a view of the garden and filled with antiques and tatami mats. My meal came with vegetable

tempura and various tofu dishes, including fried tofu on a stick and tofu boiled in a pot at my table. Other set meals include kaiseki (by reservation only), yuba, shabu-shabu or sukiyaki (¥8,000/\$67), and obento box lunches (¥3,500 and ¥5,000/\$29 and \$42).

60 Kusakawa-cho, Nanzenji. ☎ 075/761-2311. Reservations required for kaiseki. Yudofu set meal ¥3,000 (\$25); yuba kaiseki meal ¥5,000–¥8,000 (\$42–\$67); shabu-shabu or sukiyaki ¥8,000 (\$67); kaiseki set meal ¥10,000–¥20,000 (\$83–\$167). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–8pm (last order). Subway: Keage (8 min.). Bus: 5 to Nanzenji-Eikando-michi (4 min.). East of Shirakawa Dori on the road to Nanzenji Temple.

Le Grand Rêve FRENCH There aren't many restaurants in this vicinity, so this is a good choice for lunch or dinner if you're visiting nearby Sanjusangendo Hall or the Kyoto National Museum. This formal dining hall is small and intimate, overlooking a beautiful garden with a waterfall and pond. In addition to a la carte dishes, there are also set meals, including a French *kaiseki* meal (French food prepared with the imagination of kaiseki and eaten with chopsticks). The menu changes with the seasons, but past main dishes have included sautéed chicken and grilled duck with lemon-and-honey sauce.

Kyoto Park Hotel at Shichijo Dori and Higashioji Dori. ☎ 075/525-3111. Main dishes ¥1,600–¥3,000 (\$13–\$25); set dinner ¥5,000–¥8,000 (\$42–\$67); set lunch ¥2,300–¥3,500 (\$19–\$29). Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9pm. Bus: 100, 206, or 208 to Hakubutsukan Sanjusangendo-mae (1 min.). Across the street from the National Museum and beside Sanjusangendo Hall.

98 **Okutan** ★★☆☆ *Finds* TOFU/VEGETARIAN This is one of the oldest, most authentic, and most delightful tofu restaurants in Kyoto. Founded about 350 years ago as a vegetarian restaurant serving Buddhist monks, this thatched-roof wooden place in a peaceful setting with pond and garden serves just one thing: a tofu set meal (*yudofu*). Okutan is very simple and rustic with seating either in tatami rooms or outdoors on cushioned platforms, making it especially delightful in fine weather. Women dressed in traditional rural clothing bring your food. The set meal, which changes slightly with the seasons, includes a pot of tofu boiled at your table, fried tofu on a stick, vegetable tempura, yam soup, and pickled vegetables. It's all highly recommended.

86–30 Fukuchi-cho, Nanzenji. ☎ 075/771-8709. Reservations recommended. Yudofu set meal ¥3,000 (\$25). No credit cards. Fri–Wed 11am–5pm (last order). Bus: 5 or 100 to Nanzenji-Eikando-michi (6 min.). Just north of Nanzenji Temple's main gate (the San Mon Gate).

INEXPENSIVE

99 **Chorakukan** WESTERN This informal place, a good stop if you're walking from Kiyomizu Temple to Heian Shrine, is one of the few Western restaurants in eastern Kyoto. The building, which dates from the Meiji Period and also houses the Ladies' Hotel Chorakukan (p. 305), features elaborate woodwork and marble. Although the inexpensive downstairs restaurant is nothing fancy, it's restful: Classical music plays in the background, and there's a view of some maple trees. Lunch choices include fried whitefish, spaghetti, teriyaki beef steak, beef curry, and sandwiches, with a set lunch available until 5pm. After your meal, you may wish to retire to the building's coffee shop, a beautiful room reminiscent of European coffee shops. Only set meals are available for dinner, but the set dinner for ¥3,000 (\$25) is a good choice for the budget-conscious—it even includes a glass of wine.

In the southwest corner of Maruyama Park. ☎ 075/561-0001. Main dishes ¥1,000–¥2,000 (\$8.35–\$17); set dinner ¥3,000–¥8,000 (\$25–\$67); set lunch ¥2,000–¥3,500 (\$17–\$29). No credit cards. Daily 11am–7:30pm (last order). Bus: 100 or 206 to Gion (7 min.); after passing Yasaka Shrine, look to the right for a large stone-and-brick, Western-style building with a huge stone lantern in its driveway.

100 Goemonjaya TOFU/TEMPURA/NOODLES Convenient if you're visiting Nanzenji, this typical Japanese restaurant specializes in tofu dishes and tempura. With tatami seating, a small garden, a waterfall, and a carp-filled pond, it offers a *yudofu* (tofu) set meal, a shrimp or vegetarian tempura teishoku and, in summer only, inexpensive noodle dishes ranging in price from ¥650 (\$5.40) for *somen* (thin vermicelli served cold) to ¥800 (\$6.65) for *zarusoba* (cold buckwheat noodles).

67 Kukasawa-cho, Nanzenji. ☎ 075/751-9638. Set meal ¥2,200 – ¥2,900 (\$18–\$24). No credit cards. Daily 11am–7pm (last order). Closed some Tues. Bus: 5 to Nanzenji-Eikando-michi (2 min.). Across the street from Yachiyo Inn on the road leading to Nanzenji Temple, look for a red lantern beside the road and a display case of plastic food; the restaurant is back off the main road past a smiling Buddha and a red paper umbrella (open only in dry weather).

NORTHERN KYOTO

In addition to the selection here, there's a branch of the **Gontaro** noodle shop in this area, at Hinomiyashiki-cho 26 (☎ 075/463-1039), with the same English-language menu as its main shop (p. 314). It's located about halfway down the street that runs between Ryoanji and Ginkakuji, on the west side; look for the red paper lantern. It's open Thursday to Tuesday from 11am to 10pm.

INEXPENSIVE

Ryoanji Yudofuya ★★ *Finds* TOFU/VEGETARIAN If you're visiting Ryoanji Temple in northeastern Kyoto, there's no lovelier setting for a meal than this traditional restaurant, which calls itself the Ryoanji Seven Herb Tofu Restaurant in honor of the only thing it serves, *yudofu*, which is boiled tofu and vegetables topped with seven herbs. You can order it by itself, or as a set meal with side dishes. Entrance to the restaurant, situated beside the Kyoyoiike Pond, is along a small path that takes you past a stream, a small pond, a grove of maple and pine, and moss-covered grounds, which are also what you look out on as you dine, seated on tatami. You'll know you're getting close to the restaurant when you hear the thunk of a bamboo trough fed by a stream, which fills and hits against stone as it empties. Note that if you wish to come here only for a beer after visiting the temple, you'll pay an extra ¥300 (\$2.50) table charge in addition to ¥500 (\$4.15) for the beer.

Ryoanji Temple. ☎ 075/462-4742. Yudofu ¥1,500 (\$13); yudofu vegetarian set meal ¥3,300 (\$28). No credit cards. Daily 10am–5pm. Bus: 59 to Ryoanji-mae (2 min.) or 12, 50, or 51 to Ritsumeikan Daigaku-mae (4 min.).

5 Exploring the City

Because Kyoto has so many worthwhile sights, you must plan your itinerary carefully. Even the most avid sightseer can become jaded after days of visiting yet another temple or shrine, no matter how beautiful or peaceful, so be sure to temper your visits to cultural and historical sights with time spent simply walking around. Kyoto is a city best seen on foot; take time to explore small alleyways and curio shops, pausing from time to time to soak in the beauty and atmosphere. If you spend your days in Kyoto racing around in a taxi or a bus from one temple to another, the essence of this ancient capital and its charm may literally pass you by.

Before setting out, be sure to stop by **Kyoto City Tourist Information** on the second floor of Kyoto Station near the Karasuma exit (☎ 075/343-6655), or the **Tourist Information Center (TIC)** across from Kyoto Station's Karasuma exit in the Kyoto Tower Building (☎ 075/371-5649); there you can pick up a detailed map of the city and a colorful sightseeing brochure listing Kyoto's most

important sights. You can also pick up a leaflet called “Kyoto Walks,” which contains five maps for strolling tours of Kyoto, including the walk from Kiyomizu Temple to Heian Shrine and on to the Silver Pavilion, which I’ve outlined later in this chapter in more detail.

Keep in mind, too, that you must enter Kyoto’s museums, shrines, and temples at least a half-hour before closing time. Listings in this section give numbers not only for buses departing from Kyoto Station but from elsewhere as well.

For a map of Kyoto’s attractions, see the map on p. 294, “Where to Stay & Attractions in Kyoto.”

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES

If You Have 1 Day If you have only a single day to spend in Kyoto and want to see its most famous attractions, take a bus or a taxi to Gojo-zaka and then walk uphill past pottery and souvenir shops to **Kiyomizu Shrine**. Back at Gojo-zaka, board another bus (the no. 100 Chin-Chin bus) for **Heian Shrine**, where you should be sure to stroll the garden. Behind Heian Shrine is the **Kyoto Handicraft Center**, the best place in town for one-stop souvenir shopping. From here, take bus no. 204 to the stunning **Kinkakuji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion)** and, if time permits, take bus no. 12 to **Ryoanji Temple**, with the most famous rock garden in all of Japan. In the evening, dine at a traditional Japanese restaurant serving Kyoto cuisine, and follow your meal with a stroll through **Gion** and along the Kamo River.

If You Have 2 Days Spend the first day in eastern Kyoto, following the walking tour through Higashiyama-ku, which begins on p. 327; be sure to include a visit to Heian Shrine and a shopping trip to either the Kyoto Handicraft Center or the **Kyoto Craft Center** in Gion. In the evening, dine at a restaurant specializing in Kyoto cuisine, and follow the meal with a stroll along the Kamo River and Pontocho.

On the second day, visit the **Kyoto Imperial Palace** and **Nijo Castle** in central Kyoto, **Ryoanji**

Temple with its famous rock garden, and **Kinkakuji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion)** in northwestern Kyoto. End the day with visits to the **Museum of Kyoto** and to the **Shijo-Kawaramachi** shopping district, followed by a stroll through Gion and an evening performance at **Gion Corner** with its cultural demonstrations.

If You Have 3 Days Spend the first 2 days in and around Kyoto as outlined above. On the third day, head for **Nara**, Japan’s ancient capital, and its many temples and historical attractions. If it’s summer, spend the evening in **Arashiyama**, where you can board a wooden boat and observe cormorant fishing (see the box, “A Summer Spectacle: Cormorant Fishing,” on p. 337).

If You Have 4 or 5 Days (Or More) Spend the first 2 days in eastern Kyoto, following the two strolls described later in this chapter. On the third day, add **Nijo Castle**, **Kyoto Imperial Palace**, **Ryoanji Temple**, and **Temple of the Golden Pavilion** as outlined in “If You Have 2 Days,” above. Spend the fourth day in **Nara**. If you have more time, visit the **Katsura Imperial Villa**, **Saihoji Moss Temple**, or one of the other recommended destinations close to Kyoto—or spend more time exploring Kyoto, visiting the museums you haven’t had time for, shopping, or pursuing your own interests.

AROUND KYOTO STATION

As strange as it sounds, the biggest tourist draw around Kyoto Station is **Kyoto Station** itself. Japan's second-largest station building (after Nagoya) is a futuristic-looking building with soaring glass atriums, space-age music, escalators rising to a rooftop observatory, and open stages for free concerts and other events. In a bold move to attract young Japanese (who nowadays prefer to take their vacations in more exotic or trendier climes), it also has a shopping center selling everything from clothing to Kyoto souvenirs, the fashionable Isetan department store, restaurants, and a Joypolis amusement arcade. I see more tourists photographing Kyoto Station than any other modern building in town.

Just a 10- and 5-minute walk (respectively) north of Kyoto Station are two massive temple compounds, **Nishi-Honganji** and **Higashi-Honganji**. They were once joined as one huge religious center called Honganji, but they split after a disagreement several centuries ago. Higashi-Honganji is Kyoto's largest wooden structure, while Nishi-Honganji is an outstanding example of Buddhist architecture. But the best thing to do is visit Higashi-Honganji's garden, **Shosei-en** (☎ 075/371-2961), a 2-minute walk to the east. Once the private villa of Higashi-Honganji's abbot and designed in part by famous landscape architect Kobori Enshu in the 17th century, it features a pond and several buildings in a parklike setting. Although there are far more beautiful and grander gardens in Kyoto, it provides a nice respite if you're in the area and, even better, it's free (though donations are strongly encouraged). It's open daily 9am to 4pm.

Costume Museum This one-room museum is filled with an elaborate, quarter-size replica of the Spring Palace as immortalized by Murasaki Shikibu in *The Tale of Genji*, complete with scenes of ceremonies, rituals, and everyday court life depicted by dolls wearing gorgeous kimono and by miniature furniture and other objects of the Heian period. The exhibit, including costumes, changes twice a year. In an adjoining room, life-size kimono and costumes can be donned for free, so be sure to bring your camera. You can see everything in about 15 minutes.

Izutsu Building, 5th floor, Shinhanayacho Dori, Horikawa Higashiiru (on the corner of Horikawa and Shinhanayacho sts. just northeast of Nishi-Honganji Temple). ☎ 075/342-5345. Admission ¥400 (\$3.35) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) students, ¥200 (\$1.65) children 7–12. Mon–Sat 9am–5pm. Bus: 9 or 28 to Nishi-Honganji-mae (2 min.), or a 15-min. walk north from Kyoto Station.

CENTRAL KYOTO

Much of Central Kyoto has been taken over by the 21st century, but there are a few interesting sites worth investigating.

If you've never been to a market in Japan, you'll probably want to take a stroll down **Nishiki-Koji Dori**, a fish-and-produce market right in the heart of town. A covered pedestrian lane stretching west from Teramachi Dori (and just north of Shijo Dori), Nishiki-Koji has been Kyoto's principal food market for more than 4 centuries. This is where the city's finest restaurants and inns buy their food; you'll find approximately 135 open-fronted shops and stalls selling seasonal vegetables, fish, beans, seaweed, pickled vegetables, and more. Shops are open from the early-morning hours until about 6pm; many close on either Wednesday or Sunday.

Kyoto Imperial Palace (Kyoto Goshō) ★★ This is where the imperial family lived from 1331 until 1868 when they moved to Tokyo. The palace was destroyed several times by fire but was always rebuilt in its original style; the present buildings date from 1855. Modestly furnished with delicate decorations,

the palace shows the restful designs of the peaceful Heian Period. The emperor's private garden is graceful. You can visit the palace only on a free, 1-hour guided tour, but fair warning: Tours are conducted quickly, leaving little time for dawdling or taking pictures. In addition, tours view buildings only from the outside, though they do impart interesting information on court life and palace architecture.

Kyotogyoen-nai, Karasuma-Imadegawa. ☎ 075/211-1215. Free admission. Tours in English Mon–Fri at 10am and 2pm, also 3rd Sat of every month and every Sat in Apr, May, Oct, and Nov. Permission must be obtained in person from the Imperial Household Agency Office (☎ 075/211-1215), on palace grounds near the northeast corner and open Mon–Fri 8:45am–noon and 1–4pm. Foreign visitors can apply in person in advance or on the day of the tour (before 9:40am for the 10am tour, before 1:40pm for the 2pm tour), but tours can fill up (especially in spring and fall); 1-day advance application required for Sat tours. You must be 18 or older (or accompanied by an adult) and you must present your passport; parties of no more than 8 may apply. Subway: Karasuma Line to Imadegawa (exit 3); then turn left and walk south on Karasuma Dori (5 min.).

Museum of Kyoto (Kyoto Bunka Hakubutsukan) ★ Through video displays, slides, and even holograms, this museum presents Kyoto's 1,200-year history from prehistoric relics to contemporary arts and crafts. I particularly like the various architectural models depicting a local market, merchants' homes, and a wholesale store, but best of all is the vermilion-colored Heian Shrine model with its holographic display of construction workers. The third floor features changing exhibitions of Kyoto arts and crafts as well as a Japanese-style room and garden. The annex, which occupies a 1906 bank with its original main hall (complete with teller cages), houses archaeological finds and folk crafts.

Unfortunately, explanations are in Japanese only, but the museum does offer free English guides every day from 10am to 5pm; personal tours last between 30 and 60 minutes depending on your interest (since guides are volunteers, it's a good idea to make a reservation for one). A special feature of the museum is its film library, which houses hundreds of Japanese classics from silent movies to films made up to 20 years ago (the Japanese movie industry was based in Kyoto for decades). Movies are shown twice a day Thursday through Sunday (at 1:30 and 5pm at last check, but you'd be wise to confirm the time). Be sure, also, to browse the museum's large gift shop on the ground floor.

At Sanjo and Takakura sts. ☎ 075/222-0888. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children; movie admission included. Tues–Sun 10am–7:30pm. Subway: Karasuma-Oike (exit 5, 3 min.).

Nijo Castle (Nijojo) ★★ The Tokugawa shogun's Kyoto home stands in stark contrast to most of Japan's other remaining castles, which were constructed purely for defense. Built by the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu, in 1603, Nijo Castle is considered the quintessence of Momoyama architecture, built almost

Moments Cultural Immersion

If you're interested in learning firsthand about the tea ceremony, flower arranging, origami, Japanese calligraphy, Japanese cooking, and other cultural pursuits, you can do so with the help of the members of the **Women's Association of Kyoto (WAK Japan)** in the privacy of their homes or at your hotel. Contact WAK (☎ 075/212-9993; www.wakjapan.com) for information on private instruction, classes, and fees. Most classes run 1½ to 2 hours and cost ¥7,500 to ¥10,000 (\$63–\$83) per person. Reservations should be made a couple days in advance, if possible.

entirely of Japanese cypress and boasting delicate transom wood carvings and paintings by the Kano School on sliding doors. Unfortunately, no photos are allowed.

I prefer Nijo Castle to the Imperial Palace because you can explore its interior on your own. The main building, **Ninomaru Palace**, has 33 rooms, some 800 tatami mats, and an understated elegance, especially compared with castles being built in Europe at the same time. All the sliding doors on the outside walls of the castle can be removed in summer, permitting breezes to sweep through the building. Typical for Japan at the time, rooms were unfurnished, and the mattresses were stored in closets.

One of the castle's most intriguing features is its so-called **nightingale floors**. To protect the shogun from real or imagined enemies, the castle was protected by a moat and stone walls. How deep the shogun's paranoia ran, however, is apparent by the installation of these special floorboards, which creaked when trod upon in the castle corridors. The nightingale floors were supplemented by hidden alcoves for bodyguards. Furthermore, only female attendants were allowed in the shogun's private living quarters.

Outside the castle is an extensive **garden**, designed by the renowned gardener Kobori Enshu, that's famous in its own right. The original grounds of the castle, however, were without trees—supposedly because the falling of leaves in autumn reminded the shogun and his tough samurai of life's transitory nature, making them terribly sad.

Ironically, it was from Nijo Castle that Emperor Meiji issued his 1868 decree abolishing the shogunate form of government. Plan on spending an hour here, especially if you decide to rent an audio guide for ¥500 (\$4.15), recommended since it describes the significance of what you're seeing.

On the corner of Horikawa Dori and Nijo Dori. ☎ 075/841-0096. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥350 (\$2.90) high-school students, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Audio guide ¥500 (\$4.15) extra. Daily 8:45am–5pm (you must enter by 4pm). Subway: Nijojo-mae Station (1 min.). Bus: 9, 12, 50, or 101 to Nijojo-mae (1 min.).

Nishijin Textile Center (Nishijin-ori Kaikan) ★ About a 10-minute walk west of the Imperial Palace is this museum dedicated to the weavers who for centuries produced elegant textiles for the imperial family and nobility. The history of Nishijin silk weaving began with the history of Kyoto itself back in 794; by the Edo Period, there were an estimated 5,000 weaving factories in the Nishijin District. Today, the district remains home to one of Japan's largest handmade weaving industries. The museum regularly holds weaving demonstrations at its ground-floor hand looms, which use the Jacquard system of perforated cards for weaving. One of the most interesting things to do here is attend the free **Kimono Fashion Show**, held six or seven times daily, showcasing kimono that change with the seasons. Other activities—for which you need reservations—include dressing as a *maiko* (geisha apprentices) or *geiko* (professional entertainers) for ¥8,800 (\$73), or trying your own hand at producing a textile on a small loom which you can then take home with you (fee: ¥1,800/\$15). There's also, naturally, a shop selling textile products and souvenirs.

On Horikawa Dori just south of Imadegawa Dori. ☎ 075/451-9231. www.nishijin.or.jp. Free admission. Daily 9am–5pm. Subway: Imadegawa (8 min.). Bus: 9, 51, 59, or 101 to Horikawa Imadegawa (2 min.).

EASTERN KYOTO

The eastern part of Kyoto, embracing the area of Higashiyama-ku with its Kiyomizu Temple and stretching up all the way to the Temple of the Silver Pavilion

(Ginkakuji Temple), is probably the richest in terms of culture and charm. Although temples and gardens are the primary attractions, Higashiyama-ku also boasts several fine museums, forested hills and running streams, great shopping opportunities, and some of Kyoto's oldest and finest restaurants. I've included two **recommended strolls** through eastern Kyoto later in this chapter that will lead you to the region's best attractions as well as to some lesser-known sights that are worth a visit if you have the time.

Ginkakuji (The Temple of the Silver Pavilion) ★★ Ginkakuji, considered one of the more beautiful structures in Kyoto, was built in 1482 as a retirement villa for Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, who intended to coat the structure with silver in imitation of the Golden Pavilion built by his grandfather. He died before this could be accomplished, however, so the Silver Pavilion is not silver at all but remains a simple, two-story, wood structure enshrining the goddess of mercy and Jizo, the guardian god of children. Note the sand mound in the garden, shaped to resemble Mount Fuji, and the sand raked in the shape of waves, created to enhance the views during a full moon.

Ginkakuji-cho. ☎ 075/771-5725. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) junior-high and elementary students. Apr–Nov daily 8:30am–5pm; Dec–Mar daily 9am–4:30pm. Bus: 5, 17, 102, 203, or 204 to Ginkakuji-michi (10 min.); or 32 or 100 to Ginkakuji-mae (5 min.).

Heian Shrine ★★ Although it dates only from 1895, Kyoto's most famous shrine was built in commemoration of the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of Kyoto and is a replica of the main administration building of the Heian capital. It also deifies two of Japan's emperors: Emperor Kanmu, 50th emperor of Japan, who founded Heian-kyo in 794; and Emperor Komei, the 121st ruler of Japan, who ruled from 1831 to 1866. Although the orange, green, and white structure is interesting for its Heian-Era architectural style, the most important thing to see here is **Shinen Garden** ★★★, the entrance to which is on your left as you face the main hall. Typical of gardens constructed during the Meiji Era, it's famous for its weeping cherry trees in spring, its irises and water lilies in summer, and its changing maple leaves in the fall. Don't miss it.

Nishi Tennocho, Okazaki. ☎ 075/761-0221. Free admission to grounds; Shinen Garden ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Daily 8:30am–6pm (to 5pm Nov–Feb). Subway: Higashiyama (10 min.). Bus: 5, 32, 46, or 100 to Kyoto Kaikan Bijutsukan-mae (2 min.).

Hosomi Art Museum ★ This highly acclaimed private museum houses changing exhibits of Buddhist and Shinto art, primarily from temples and shrines in Kyoto and Nara, including Heian bronze mirrors, Buddhist paintings, lacquerware, tea-ceremony objects, scrolls, folding screens, and pottery. In contrast to the objects it contains, the building itself is starkly modern, complete with automatic doors that open and clang shut with the finality of a prison. The 30 minutes it takes to walk through are worthwhile; be sure to browse through the gift shop of finely crafted goods.

6–3 Okazaki, Saishoji-cho. ☎ 075/752-5555. Admission ¥700 (\$5.85) adults, ¥500 (\$4.15) university students and children. Tues–Sun 10am–6pm. Subway: Higashiyama (exit 2, 5 min.). Bus: 31, 201, 202, or 206 to Higashiyama-Nijo (2 min.). Catty-corner from the Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts (Fureaikan).

Kiyomizu Temple (Kiyomizudera) ★★★ This is Higashiyama-ku's most famous temple, known throughout Japan for the grand views afforded from its main hall. Founded in 798 and rebuilt in 1633 by the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, the temple occupies an exalted spot on Mount Otowa, with its main hall constructed over a cliff and featuring a large wooden veranda supported

by 139 pillars, each 15m (49 ft.) high. The main hall is dedicated to the goddess of mercy and compassion, but most visitors come for the magnificence of its height and view, which are so well known to the Japanese that the idiom “jumping from the veranda of Kiyomizu Temple” means that they’re about to undertake some particularly bold or daring adventure. Kiyomizu’s grounds are particularly spectacular (and crowded) in spring during cherry-blossom season and in fall during the turning of the maple leaves.

Also worth checking out are the three-story pagoda and Otowa Falls (known for the purity of its water; *kiyomizu* translates as “pure water”), but be sure not to spite the gods by neglecting to visit **Jishu Shrine** ★★ (☎ 075/541-2097), a vermilion-colored Shinto shrine behind Kiyomizu’s main hall that has long been considered the dwelling place of the god of love and matchmaking. Ask for the English pamphlet and be sure to take the ultimate test: On the shrine’s grounds are two “love-fortune-telling” stones placed 9m (30 ft.) apart; if you’re able to walk from one to the other with your eyes closed, your desires for love will be granted.

☎ 075/551-1234. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) children 7–15. Daily 6am–6pm (Jishu Shrine closes at 5pm). Bus: 80, 100, 202, 206, or 207 to Gojo-zaka (10 min.).

Kodai-ji Temple Located between Kiyomizu Temple and Yasaka Shrine, this temple was founded by Toyotomi Hideyoshi’s widow, popularly referred to as Nene, to commemorate her husband and to pacify his spirit. Shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu, who served under Toyotomi before becoming shogun, financed its construction. It contains lovely gardens laid out by Kobori Enshu, as well as tea-houses designed by Sen no Rikyu, a famous 16th-century tea master. A memorial hall enshrines wooden images of Hideyoshi (to the left) and Nene. Nene, by the way, became a Buddhist nun after her husband’s death, as was the custom of noblewomen at the time.

Yasakatorii-mae-sagaru, Shimo-Kawaramachi. ☎ 075/561-9966. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥250 (\$2.10) children. Daily 9am–5pm. Bus: 100 or 206 to Higashiyama Yasui (5 min.).

Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts (Fureaikan) ★★ (finds Near Heian Shrine is this excellent museum dedicated to the many crafts that flourished during Kyoto’s long reign as the imperial capital. Various displays and videos demonstrate the step-by-step production of crafts ranging from stone lanterns and fishing rods to textiles, paper fans, umbrellas, boxwood combs, lacquerware, Buddhist altars, and Noh masks. The displays are fascinating, the crafts beautiful, and explanations in English, making even a 30-minute stop here well worth the effort. Crafts are sold in the museum shop.

In the basement of the Miyako Messe (International Exhibition Hall), 9–1 Seishoji-cho, Okazaki. ☎ 075/762-2670. <http://web.kyoto-inet.or.jp/org/fureaika>. Free admission. Daily 9am–5pm. Subway: Higashiyama (5 min.). Bus: 5, 32, 46, or 100 to Kyoto Kaikan Bijutsukan-mae (2 min.).

Kyoto National Museum (Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan) ★★ This museum, housed in a French baroque–style building constructed in 1897, features changing exhibits highlighting magnificent art objects and treasures, many of which once belonged to Kyoto’s many temples and the imperial court. Japanese and Chinese ceramics, sculpture, Japanese paintings, clothing and kimono, lacquerware, and metal works are always on display, making this the best museum in town for viewing the ancient capital’s priceless treasures. Plan on staying about an hour, but if you’ve seen the more extensive Tokyo National Museum, you may want to skip this one.

527 Chaya-machi (across the street from Sanjusangendo Hall). ☎ 075/541-1151. www.kyohaku.go.jp. Admission ¥420 (\$3.50) adults, ¥130 (\$1.10) university and high-school students, free for junior-high and elementary students. Free admission 2nd and 4th Sat of the month. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm. Bus: 100, 206, or 208 to Hakubutsukan Sanjusangendo-mae (1 min.).

Sanjusangendo Hall ★★☆☆ Originally founded as Rengeoin Temple in 1164 and rebuilt in 1266, Sanjusangendo Hall has one of the most visually stunning sights I've seen in a Japanese temple: 1,001 wooden statues of the thousand-handed Kannon. Row upon row, these life-size figures, carved from Japanese cypress in the 12th and 13th centuries, make an impressive sight; in the middle is a large seated Kannon carved in 1254 by Tankei, a famous sculptor from the Kamakura Period. Don't expect to actually see a thousand arms on each statue; there are only 40, the idea being that each hand has the power to save 25 worlds. To accommodate the thousand-handed Kannon as well as 30 other statues representing the Kannon's disciples, the hall stretches almost 120m (400 ft.), making it the longest wooden building in Japan (no photography is allowed in the building). Its length was too hard to ignore—in the corridor behind the statues, archery competitions were held; standing here, you can easily imagine how hard it must have been to hit a piece of sacred cloth attached to the wall at the opposite end.

Shichijo Dori. ☎ 075/525-0033. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) junior-high and high-school students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Apr to mid-Nov daily 8am–5pm; mid-Nov to Mar daily 9am–4pm. Bus: 100, 206, or 208 to Hakubutsukan Sanjusangendo-mae (1 min.).

NORTHERN KYOTO

Two of Kyoto's most famous sights are in the northwestern corner of the city.

Kinkakuji (Temple of the Golden Pavilion) ★★☆☆ One of Kyoto's best-known attractions—and the inspiration for the Temple of the Silver Pavilion (above)—Kinkakuji was constructed in the 1390s as a retirement villa for Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu and features a three-story pavilion covered in gold leaf with a roof topped by a bronze phoenix. Apparently, the retired shogun lived in shameless luxury while the rest of the nation suffered from famine, earthquakes, and plague. If you come here on a clear day, the Golden Pavilion shimmers against a blue sky, its reflection captured in the waters of a calm pond. However, this pavilion is not the original; in 1950, a disturbed student monk burned Kinkakuji to the ground (the story is told by author Mishima Yukio in his famous novel, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*). The temple was rebuilt in 1955 and in 1987 was re-covered in gold leaf, five times thicker than the original coating: You almost need sunglasses. Be sure to explore the surrounding **park** with its moss-covered grounds and teahouses.

Kinkakuji-cho. ☎ 075/461-0013. Admission ¥400 (\$3.35) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Daily 9am–5pm. Bus: 101, 102, 204, or 205 to Kinkakuji-michi (3 min.).

Ryoanji Temple ★★☆☆ About a 20-minute walk southwest of the Golden Pavilion is Ryoanji—home to what is probably the most famous **Zen rock garden** ★★☆☆ in all of Japan—laid out at the end of the 15th century during the Muromachi Period. Fifteen rocks set in waves of raked white pebbles are surrounded on three sides by a clay wall and on the fourth by a wooden veranda. Sit down here and contemplate what the artist was trying to communicate. The interpretation of the rocks is up to the individual. (Mountains above the clouds? Islands in the ocean?) My only objection to this peaceful place is that, unfortunately, it's not always peaceful—a loudspeaker on occasion extols the virtue of

the garden, destroying any chance for peaceful meditation. If you get here early enough, you may be able to escape both the crowds and the noise.

After visiting the rock garden, be sure to take a walk around the temple grounds. There's a 1,000-year-old **pond**, on the rim of which sits a beautiful little restaurant, **Ryoanji Yudofuya** (★), with tatami rooms and screens, where you can eat yudofu (p. 319) and enjoy the view. There's also a nice landscape garden, with moss so inviting you wish you could lie down and take a nap.

Goryoshita-cho. ☎ 075/463-2216. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Mar–Nov daily 8am–5pm; Dec–Feb daily 8:30am–4:30pm. Bus: 59 to Ryoanji-mae (2 min.); or 12, 50, or 51 to Ritsumeikan Daigaku-mae (4 min.).

Toei Uzumasa Eiga Mura (Toei Uzumasa MovieLand) (★) *Kids* If your kids are ready to mutiny because of yet another temple, get on their good side by coming to this studio park, one of Japan's three major film companies and where most of the samurai flicks are made. Don't expect the high-tech, polished glitz of American theme parks—rather, this is a working studio with indoor and outdoor movie sets re-creating the mood, setting, and atmosphere of feudal and turn-of-the-20th-century Japan, complete with “villages” lined with samurai houses and old-time shops. Stagehands carry around props, hammers and saws, and rework sets. You may even see a famous star walking around dressed in samurai garb, or come upon a scene being filmed. There are, of course, other attractions, including a museum tracing the history of the film industry, a 20-minute Ninja show four times a day Monday through Friday, a special-effects show, a haunted house, a games arcade, and indoor rides and play areas for children. You can also have a photo taken of yourself decked out in a kimono or samurai gear. **Note:** Back lots are open only on weekends when there is no filming, but kids will prefer a weekday when there are Ninja shows and filming. Come here only if you have a lot of time (you'll probably spend a minimum of 2 hr. here), are a cinema buff, or have youngsters in tow.

10 Higashi-Hachigaokacho, Uzumasa, Ukyo-ku. ☎ 075/864-7718. Admission ¥2,200 (\$18) adults, ¥1,300 (\$11) junior-high and high-school students, ¥1,100 (\$9.15) children. Daily 9am–5pm (9:30am–4pm Dec–Feb). Closed Dec 21–Jan 1. Train: JR line to Uzumasa or Hanazono Station (8 min.) or Keifuku Line to Uzumasa (5 min.). Bus: 75 to Uzumasa Eigamuramichi (4 min.).

WALKING TOUR 1

A STROLL THROUGH HIGASHIYAMA-KU

- Start:** Sanjusangendo Hall on Shichijo Dori a couple of blocks east of the Kamo River; to get there, walk 20 minutes from Kyoto Station or take bus no. 100, 206, or 208 to Hakubutsukan Sanjusangendo-mae.
- Finish:** Kyoto Craft Center, Shijo Dori, Gion.
- Time:** Allow approximately 5 hours, including stops for shopping and museums.
- Best Times:** Weekdays, when temples and shops aren't as crowded.
- Worst Times:** Monday, when the Kyoto National Museum is closed; Wednesday, when the Kyoto Craft Center is closed.

A stroll through Higashiyama-ku will take you to Kiyomizu Temple, one of Kyoto's most famous sights, and other worthwhile attractions like Sanjusangendo Hall and the Kyoto National Museum. It will also take you through some of Kyoto's most charming neighborhoods, with plenty of shopping opportunities en route.

Although the walking-tour leaflet (“Kyoto Walks”) distributed by the TIC claims that you can walk from Kiyomizu Temple to Heian Shrine in 50 minutes,

I don't see how it's possible unless you run the whole way. I've walked this route almost a dozen times, and it's always taken me the better part of a day—perhaps I'm slow, but it's a pace that I've found does justice to this wonderful area of Kyoto.

Note: The second walk, “The Philosopher’s Stroll” (below), includes several attractions that could be combined with this walk if you don't have time for two walks. If you continue walking north from Maruyama Park instead of heading west for Gion, for example, you could take in Heian Shrine and the Kyoto Handicraft Center (covered at the end of the 2nd walk). In any case, since eastern Kyoto has some of the city's most traditional and beautiful restaurants, be sure to read through the dining section to decide beforehand where you want to eat lunch or dinner.

Start your stroll at:

① Sanjusangendo Hall

This hall dates from 1266 and is only about 15m (50 ft.) wide, but stretches almost 120m (400 ft.), making it the longest wooden building in Japan. However, it's not the building itself that impresses you, but what it contains—1,001 life-size images of the thousand-handed Kannon. Seeing so many of them—row upon row of gold figures, glowing in the dark hall—is stunning (no photographs allowed). In the middle is a 3.3m (11-ft.) tall seated figure of Kannon carved in 1254. At the back of the hall is a 117m (130-yd.) archery range where a competition is held every January 15. (See “Exploring the City,” earlier in this chapter, for more information on this and other major sights described in this stroll.)

Across the street is the:

② Kyoto National Museum (Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan)

In 1889, the Meiji government, fearful that Japan's cultural objects were going the way of the samurai with the increasing import of Western ways and products, established three national museums—one in Tokyo, one in Nara, and this one in Kyoto, which serves as a repository for art objects and treasures that once belonged to Kyoto's temples and royal court. Individual items, most of which come from the museum's own collection, are rotated continuously, which means that no

matter how many times you come here you'll always see something new. Always on display are ceramics, paintings, calligraphy, lacquerware, textiles, and sculptures. For ancient art, there's no better place in town than this.



TAKE A BREAK

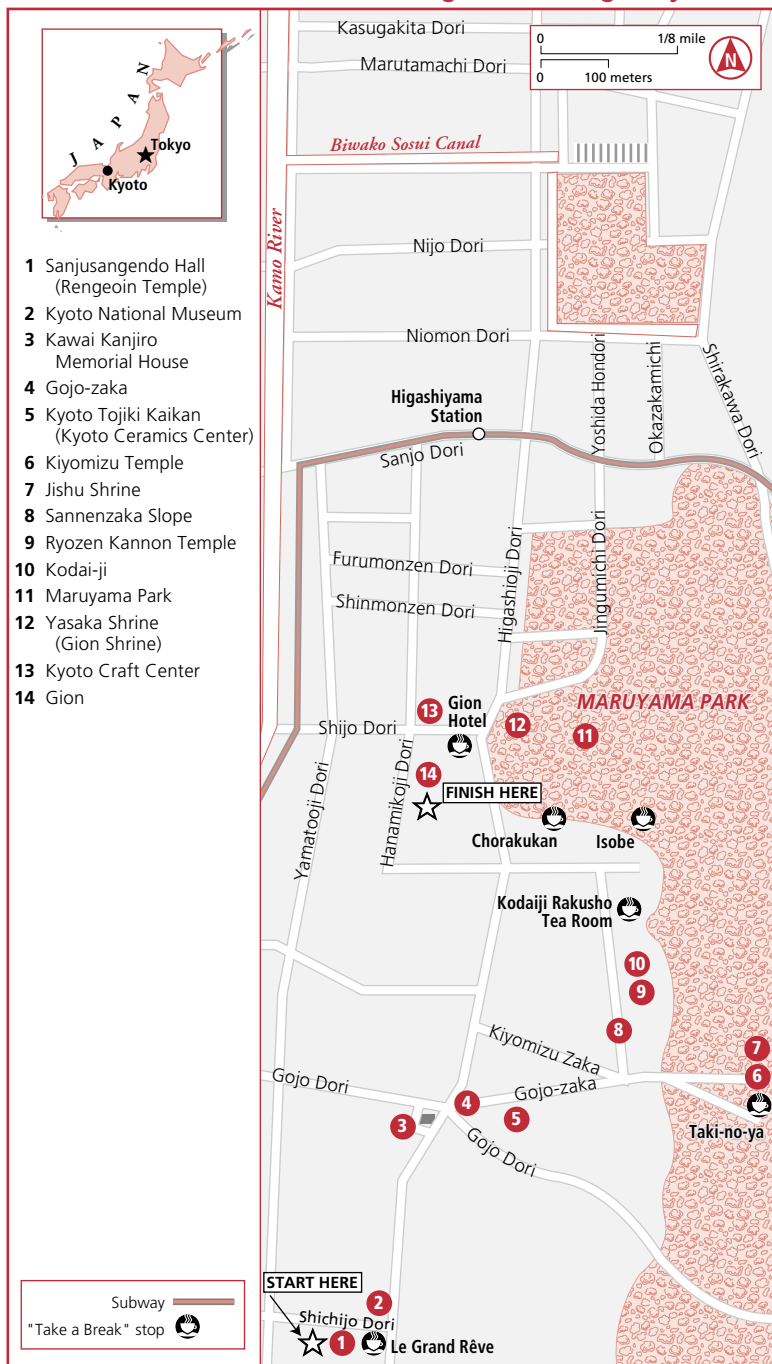
Just past Sanjusangendo Hall is the Park Hotel, where you'll find the delightful **Le Grand Rêve**, a restaurant with views of a beautiful garden that serves French *kaiseki*—that is, French food served in courses and eaten with chopsticks (p. 318.) There's also a lobby lounge with nice garden views.

Just east of the Park Hotel (toward the wooded hills) are Higashioji Dori and a stoplight; take a left and walk about 5 minutes until you come to the first stoplight, at a small intersection with a Sunkus convenience store. Turn left here, take the first right down a narrow street, and to your right you'll soon see:

③ Kawai Kanjiro Memorial House

Kawai Kanjiro Memorial House, Gojo-zaka (☎ 075/561-3585), is the former home and studio of one of Japan's most well-known potters, Kawai Kanjiro (1890–1966). Inspired at a young age by Bernard Leach and one of the co-founders of the Japan Folk Crafts Museum in Tokyo, this versatile man handmade much of the furniture in this lovely home, which is

Walking Tour 1—Higashiyama-ku



a traditional Japanese house with an indoor open-pit fireplace and gleaming woodwork. Pottery, personal effects, and his outdoor clay kiln, built on a slope in the traditional Japanese method, are all on display, but this museum is worth seeing for the house alone, especially if you haven't had much opportunity to see the interiors of traditional Japanese homes. Admission is ¥900 (\$7.50) for adults, ¥500 (\$4.15) for students, and ¥300 (\$2.50) for children. Open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 5pm.

Take a right out of the museum, walk to the busy road with the overpass, and turn right. When you get to the big intersection, look catty-corner across the intersection to the left and you'll see a slope leading uphill (to the left of the two big stone lanterns). It's called:

4 Gojo-zaka

Gojo-zaka is lined with pottery shops including:

5 Kyoto Tojiki Kaikan

This store to the right offers two floors of pottery from various artists (see p. 340 for more information).

After passing many more pottery and souvenir shops as the slope continues uphill (keep to the left when the road forks), you'll eventually reach stairs leading to:

6 Kiyomizu Temple

This temple is the star attraction of this stroll. First founded in 798 and rebuilt in 1633 by the third Tokugawa shogun, Iemitsu, the temple occupies an exalted spot. The main hall is built over a cliff and features a large wooden veranda supported by 139 pillars, each 15m (49 ft.) high. Take in the view of Kyoto from its deck, but to fully appreciate the grandeur of the main hall with its pillars and dark wood, be sure to walk to the three-story pagoda, which offers the best view of the main hall, built without the use of a single nail. From the pagoda, descend the stone steps to Otowa Falls, where you'll see Japanese lined up to drink

from the refreshing spring water. Kiyomizu's name, in fact, translates as "pure water." From here you'll also have the best view of the temple's impressive pillars.



TAKE A BREAK

On the grounds of Kiyomizu Temple, just beside Otowa Falls, is **Taki-no-ya**, an open-air pavilion, where you can sit on tatami and enjoy noodles and a beer or shaved ice colored with various flavors. This is a great place to stop (and now you know why this walk takes me all day). If you're lucky to be here in autumn, the fiery reds of the maple trees will set the countryside around you aflame. Open Friday through Wednesday from 10am to 5pm.

Before departing Kiyomizu Temple, be sure to make a stop at the vermilion-colored Shinto shrine located behind the temple's main hall:

7 Jishu Shrine

The shrine is regarded as a dwelling place of the deity in charge of love and matchmaking. Ask for the English-language leaflet that gives its history. Throughout the grounds are signs and descriptions in English telling about its various parts; for once, you're not left in the dark about the purpose of the various statues and memorials and what the Japanese are doing as they make their rounds. It's very enriching. You can buy good-luck charms for everything from a happy marriage to easy delivery of a child to success in passing an examination. On the shrine's grounds are two stones placed about 9m (30 ft.) apart—if you're able to walk from one stone to the other with your eyes closed, you're supposedly guaranteed success in your love life. It sure doesn't hurt to try. There's also a place where you can write down your troubles on a piece of paper and then submerge it in a bucket of water, which supposedly will cause both the paper and your troubles to dissolve.

If you failed the rock test, you might make a point of stopping here.

From Kiyomizu Temple, retrace your steps downhill on the road directly in front of the temple's main gate. You'll again pass shop after shop selling sweets, pottery, fans, ties, hats, souvenirs, and curios. It's okay to go crazy shopping here, but remember that you're going to have to carry whatever you buy. After passing a couple of small shrines nestled in among the shops, you'll come to a split in the road and a small shrine on the right shaded by trees in front. Just beside this shrine are stone steps leading downhill (north) to a stone-cobbled street called:

8 Sannenzaka Slope

The slope leads past lovely antiques and curio shops and winds through neighborhoods of wooden buildings reminiscent of old Kyoto. Keep your eyes peeled for downhill stairs to the right leading to Maruyama Park; after you take these, the street will wind a bit as it goes downhill and eventually end at a T intersection. Take the stairs opposite the road to:

9 Ryozen Kannon Temple

This temple has a 24m (80-ft.) high white statue dedicated to unknown soldiers who died in World War II. Memorial services are conducted four times daily at a shrine that contains memorial tablets of the two million Japanese who perished during the war. There's also a Memorial Hall commemorating the more than 48,000 foreign soldiers who died on Japanese territory. Open daily from 8:30am to 4:20pm; since admission is ¥200 (\$1.65), you may just want to take a peek at the statue. Just past Ryozen Kannon Temple across the parking lot is:

10 Kodaiji Temple

This temple was founded by the widow Nene in commemoration of her husband, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who succeeded in unifying Japan at the end of the 16th century. In addition to tea-houses and a memorial hall containing wooden images of the couple, there's a

beautiful garden designed by master gardener Kobori Enshu.

Exit Kodai-ji Temple via the main steps leading downhill and turn right, continuing north.



TAKE A BREAK

Past Kodai-ji Temple and just before the street ends at a pagoda with a crane on top, keep your eyes peeled for a teahouse on your right with a garden, which you can glimpse from the street through a gate. The ⑩ **Kodaiji Rakusho Tea Room**, 516 Washiochiyo (☎ 075/561-6892), is a lovely place and one of my favorite tearooms in Kyoto. It has a 100-year-old miniature garden with a pond that's home to some of the largest and most colorful carp I've ever seen, some of which are 20 years old and winners of the many medals displayed in the back room. In summer, stop for *somen* (finely spun cold noodles), tea, or traditional desserts, and refresh yourself with views of the small but beautiful garden from one of the tables or from the back tatami room. If you're a gardener, you'll probably want to give up the hobby after you've seen what's possible—but rarely achieved. Open from 9:30am to 5:30pm (until 6pm in summer); closed 1 day a week but, unfortunately, not a fixed day.

Continue on your stroll by taking a right out of the teahouse; turn right at the pagoda and then take an immediate left, which marks the beginning of:

11 Maruyama Park

An unkempt field of shrubs and weeds until designated a public park in 1886, this is one of Kyoto's most popular outdoor respites, filled with ponds, pigeons, and gardens. In spring, it's one of the most popular spots for viewing cherry blossoms; to the left after you enter the park is one of the oldest, most famous cherry trees in Kyoto. Also farther west is:

12 Yasaka Shrine

Yasaka Shrine is also known as Gion Shrine because of its proximity to the Gion District. Its present buildings

date from 1654; the stone torii on the south side are considered among the largest in Japan. But the reason most people come here is one of practicality—the shrine is dedicated to the gods of health and prosperity, two universal concerns. This shrine, which is free to the public and open 24 hours, is packed during the Gion Festival and on New Year's Eve.



TAKE A BREAK

If you need a meal more substantial than the open-air pavilions at Kiyomizu and the teahouse were able to provide, a good choice for Japanese food is **Isobe**, located on the southeastern edge of Maruyama Park (turn right as soon as you enter the park from the south) and offering obento lunch boxes, tempura, shabu-shabu, and an assortment of Japanese cuisine. For Western food there's **Chorakukan**, located in a brick-and-stone Meiji-Era building at the southwest corner of Maruyama Park (to the left as you enter the park from the south). See p. 317 and 318 for complete reviews.

Exit Yasaka Shrine to the west; this brings you to a busy street called Higashioji. Cross it and continue walking west, on the right side of busy Shijo Dori, where you'll soon come to the:

⑬ Kyoto Craft Center

The center carries beautifully crafted traditional items by local and famous artisans, including glassware, pottery, jewelry, baskets, and more (see p. 340 for more information).

Across Shijo Dori is:

⑭ Gion

Gion is one of Japan's most famous nightlife districts. It's centered primarily on Hanamikoji Dori, which translates as "Narrow Street for Flower Viewing." This is Kyoto's long-standing geisha district, an enclave of discreet, traditional, and almost solemn-looking wooden homes that reveal nothing of the gaiety that goes on inside—drinking, conversation, and business dealings with dancing, singing, and music provided by geisha and their apprentices, called *maiko*. If it's early evening, you might glimpse one of these women as she small-steps her way in geta to an evening appointment, elaborately made up and wearing a beautiful kimono. You might also wish to visit **Gion Corner** on Hanamikoji Dori, which offers performances of dance, puppetry, and other traditional arts nightly; see "Kyoto After Dark," later in this chapter, for details.



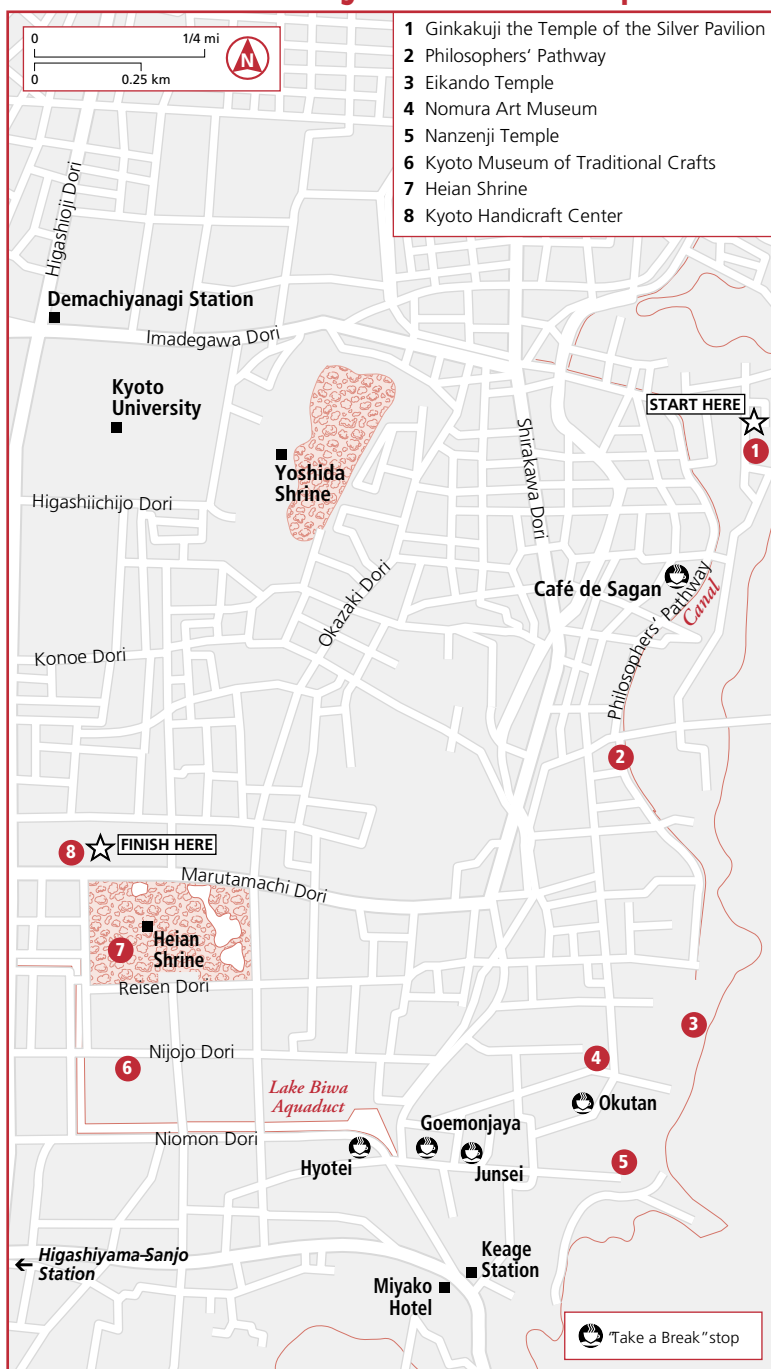
WINDING DOWN

If all this sightseeing and shopping have made you thirsty, there are many restaurants and bars to the west across the Kamo River, on Pontocho, and near Shijo and Kawaramachi streets. See "Where to Dine in Kyoto" and "Kyoto After Dark," in this chapter for many suggestions in this area.

WALKING TOUR 2 THE PHILOSOPHER'S STROLL

- Start:** Ginkakuji, the Temple of the Silver Pavilion; from Kyoto Station, take bus no. 100 to Ginkakuji-mae stop or bus no. 5 or 17 to Ginkakuji-michi stop.
- Finish:** Kyoto Handicraft Center, Marutamachi Dori.
- Time:** Allow about 5 hours, including stops along the way.
- Best Times:** Early on weekdays, when crowds aren't as thick.
- Worst Times:** There is no worst time for this walk.

Walking Tour 2—The Philosopher's Stroll



This stroll takes in the Temple of the Silver Pavilion as well as a couple of other temples, a museum dedicated to Kyoto's traditional crafts, Kyoto's most well-known shrine and its garden, and the best place in town for one-stop souvenir shopping. Linking the Silver Pavilion with the other sights is a canal lined by trees—a path known as the **Philosopher's Pathway**.

From Kyoto Station, take bus no. 100 to the Ginkakuji-mae stop or bus no. 5 or 17 to the Ginkakuji-michi stop, head east (toward the wooded hills) along the canal, and continue east when the canal veers to the (right) south, up the gentle slope to:

① Ginkakuji, the Temple of the Silver Pavilion

This temple is the architectural jewel of this stroll. Contrary to its name, however, it isn't silver at all. It was built in 1482 as a retirement villa for Shogun Ashikaga Yoshimasa, who intended to coat the structure with silver in imitation of the Golden Pavilion built by his grandfather. He died before this could be accomplished, however, which is just as well—the wood of the Silver Pavilion is spectacular just as it is. The whole complex is designed for enjoyment of the tea ceremony, moon viewing, and other aesthetic pursuits, with a beautiful garden of rippled sand, rocks, and moss. One of the small sand hills is in the image of Mount Fuji. It's easy to imagine the splendor, formality, and grandeur of the life of Japan's upper class as you wander the grounds here. Be sure to take the hillside pathway with its look-out point, dozens of different kinds of moss, and streams; you might be able to escape the crowds that sometimes overwhelm this attraction.

Head back to that narrow canal you saw on the way to the temple, heading south lined with cherry, willow, and maple trees and flanked by a small pathway. It's known as the:

② Philosopher's Pathway

The name Philosopher's Pathway refers to the fact that, throughout the ages, philosophers and priests have strolled this tranquil canal thinking deep thoughts. It's a particularly beautiful

sight in spring during the cherry-blossom season. The pathway runs almost a mile, allowing you to think your own deep thoughts.



TAKE A BREAK

Approximately 5 minutes down the Philosopher's Pathway, to the right, is **Café de Sagan** ☎ 075/751-7968, a coffee shop with an English-language menu listing sandwiches, desserts, beer, and juices. It's open Wednesday through Monday from 7am to 5pm, with views of the shaded path through its windows.

At the end of the Philosopher's Pathway (a 30-min. walk), near Nyakuoji Shrine, turn right and walk for a few minutes through a residential area until you reach a street with some traffic on it (and a wooden sign pointing toward Eikando and Nanzenji). Here you should turn left. After a couple of minutes, on the left, you'll come to:

③ ⑩ Eikando Temple

Founded in 856, this temple (also known as **Zenrinji Temple**; ☎ 075/761-0007) derives its popular name from the seventh head priest Eikan (1032–1111), who was loved by the people for attending to the impoverished sick and for planting plum trees as sources of medicine. The temple is famous for a small statue of the Amida Buddha with his head turned, looking back over his shoulder. According to popular lore, it was carved after Eikan, who while walking and reciting chants he believed would propel him toward rebirth, was so astonished to see that the Amida Buddha had descended from the altar and was walking ahead of him that he stopped short in his tracks, whereupon the Buddha looked

back over his shoulder and admonished, “Eikan, you are dawdling.” How typically Zen. The Buddha facing backward is in the Amidado Hall. Otherwise, there isn’t much to see unless it’s autumn and the many maples here are at their most glorious. The temple’s pagoda, up on a hillside, offers a view over the city. Open daily from 9am to 4pm; admission is ¥600 (\$5), except in autumn when it’s ¥1,000 (\$8.35).

A minute’s walk farther south brings you to the:

④ **Nomura Art Museum**

This small museum (☎ 075/751-0374) is on the right and features a private collection mainly of objects used in tea ceremonies, calligraphy, ceramics, and Noh masks. It’s open only March to June and September to November, Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 4:30pm. Admission is ¥700 (\$5.85).

Just past the museum, on the left, is:

⑤ **Nanzenji Temple**

Nanzenji Temple (☎ 075/771-0365) is a Rinzai Zen temple set amid a grove of spruce. One of Kyoto’s best-known Zen temples, it was founded in 1293, though its present buildings date from the latter part of the 16th century during the Momoyama Period. Attached to the main hall (Hojo) is a Zen rock garden attributed to Kobori Enshu; it’s sometimes called “Young Tigers Crossing the Water” because of the shape of one of the rocks, but the association is a bit of a stretch for me. In the building behind the main hall is a sliding door with a famous painting by Kano Tanyu of a tiger drinking water in a bamboo grove. Spread throughout the temple precincts are a dozen other lesser temples and buildings worth exploring if you have the time, including Nanzen-in, which was built about the same time as Nanzenji Temple and served as the emperor’s vacation house whenever

he visited the temple grounds. The temple is open daily from 8:40am to 5pm (to 4:30pm in winter); admission to the main hall is ¥500 (\$4.15) and to Nanzen-in ¥300 (\$2.50).



TAKE A BREAK

Several traditional restaurants near Nanzenji reflect the settings of the temples themselves. **Okutan**, just north of Nanzenji and with a view of a peaceful pond, has been serving vegetarian tofu meals for 350 years. On the road leading west from Nanzenji are **Junsei**, serving tofu, obento lunch boxes, and kaiseki in a beautiful garden setting; **Goemonjaya**, which serves moderately priced set meals and noodles; and **Hyotei**, which opened more than 300 years ago to serve pilgrims to Nanzenji, offering obento lunches as well as expensive kaiseki. See “Where to Dine in Kyoto,” earlier in this chapter, for details.

Head straight out (west) from Nanzenji until you see a body of water on your right, the Lake Biwa Aqueduct. Continue west on Niomon Dori (the water will be on your right) to the vermilion-colored bridge to your right, where you’ll also see a vermilion-colored torii gate. Turn right here and continue straight ahead to Nijo Dori, where you turn left for one of my favorite museums, the:

⑥ **Kyoto Museum of Traditional Crafts (Fureaikan)**

This museum displays all the Kyoto crafts you can think of, from combs, umbrellas, and fans to textiles, sweets, bambooware, and masks. Explanations in English and videos describe how the crafts are made (mostly by hand). The best news: The museum is free. For more details, see p. 325.

Farther north, it would be hard to miss:

⑦ **Heian Shrine**

If orange and green are your favorite colors, you’re going to love Heian Shrine, one of Kyoto’s most famous. Although it was built as late as 1895 in

commemoration of the 1,100th anniversary of the founding of Kyoto, Heian Shrine is a replica of the city's first administrative quarters, built in Kyoto in 794, giving you some idea of the architecture back then. The most important thing to see here is the **garden**, the entrance to which is on your left as you face the main hall. Typical of gardens constructed during the Meiji Era, it's famous for its weeping cherry trees in spring, its irises and water lilies in summer, and its changing maple leaves in the fall. I love sitting on the bench on the wooden bridge topped by a phoenix; you'll probably want to dawdle here, too.

Take a right out of the shrine's main exit onto Reisen Dori and then take the next right, which after 5 minutes will bring you to the:

8 Kyoto Handicraft Center

This center is located behind the shrine on its north side. It's the best place in Kyoto for one-stop shopping for souvenirs of Japan, including pearls, kimono and yukata, fans, paper products, toys, and more; see p. 340 for complete information. You may want to take advantage of the free hourly shuttle service the center provides to major hotels in Kyoto; the last bus departs at 6:05pm.

6 Imperial Villas & Temples Within Easy Reach of Kyoto

If this is your first visit to Kyoto and you're here for only a couple days, you should concentrate on seeing sights in Kyoto itself. If, however, this is your second trip to Kyoto, you're here for an extended period of time, or you have a passion for traditional Japanese architecture or gardens, there are a number of worthwhile attractions in the region surrounding Kyoto. Foremost on my list is **Katsura Imperial Villa**.

Note: The Katsura Imperial Villa, **Shugakuin Imperial Villa**, and **Saihoji** (popularly called the Moss Temple) all require advance permission to visit. To see the Katsura Imperial Villa or Shugakuin Imperial Villa, which are free, you must apply for permission in person at the **Imperial Household Agency Office** (☎ 075/221-1215; no English is spoken and no reservations are accepted by phone, but you can call to see whether space is available), located on the north-west grounds of the **Kyoto Imperial Palace** near Inui Gomon Gate, a 5-minute walk from Imadegawa subway station. It's open Monday through Friday from 8:45am to noon and 1 to 4pm.

Tours, which take place weekdays and the third Saturday of every month year-round, as well as on Saturdays in April, May, October, and November (no tours on national holidays), are given at Katsura Imperial Villa at 10am and 2pm and at Shugakuin Imperial Villa at 9am, 10am, 11am, 1:30pm, and 3pm. In the off season, you may be able to make a reservation for a tour on the same day, though keep in mind that it takes an hour to reach Katsura Imperial Villa and 30 minutes to reach Shugakuin by taxi from the Imperial Household Agency Office. It's always better, therefore, to make a reservation a day or two in advance; in spring and fall, try to make a reservation a week in advance. The time of your tour will be designated when you apply. Parties are limited to four persons, everyone must present their passports, and participants must be at least 18 years old. Tours are conducted in Japanese only, but an English-language video is shown.

For tours of Saihoji, see below.

KATSURA IMPERIAL VILLA ★★ ★ About a 15-minute walk from Katsura Station on the Hankyu railway line, or a 30-minute bus ride from Kyoto Station

A Summer Spectacle: Cormorant Fishing

If you're lucky enough to be in Kyoto between July 1 and September 15, I highly recommend that you spend one evening on the Oi River, drifting in a wooden boat and watching men fishing with trained cormorants, or seabirds. **Cormorant fishing** ★★☆☆ takes place in Arashiyama every evening in summer (except when there's a full moon or during and after a heavy rain). There are two 1-hour shows, at 7 and 8pm in July and August and at 6:30 and 7:30pm September 1 to September 15. For a fee of ¥1,700 (\$14) for adults and ¥850 (\$7.10) for children, you can board a narrow wooden boat gaily decorated with paper lanterns. Along with dozens of others, your boatman will pole you down the river so you can see the fishing boats lit by blazing torches. The cormorants, with rings around their necks so they don't swallow the fish they catch, dive under the water for *ayu*, a small river fish. Water taxis ply the river offering snacks and beer. I find the whole experience terribly romantic. If you're on a budget, however, you can watch from shore.

Cormorant fishing takes place near the **Togetsukyo Bridge** in Arashiyama, about 7km (4½ miles) from Central Kyoto. You can reach it by taking the **JR Sagano Line** from Kyoto Station to Saga Arashiyama Station; from there, it's a 15-minute walk. There's also a local commuter line, the **Keifuku Arashiyama Line**, which you can catch on Shijo Dori at either Shijo-Omiya Station or Sai Station; take it to Arashiyama (the last stop), from where it's a 2-minute walk. Or catch **bus no. 71, 72, or 73** from Kyoto Station and take it to Arashiyama, from where it's a 1-minute walk.

(take bus no. 33 to the Katsura Rikyu-mae stop) and then a 5-minute walk, this villa is considered the jewel of traditional Japanese architecture and landscape gardening. It was built between 1620 and 1624 by Prince Toshihito, brother of the emperor, with construction continued by Toshihito's son. The garden, markedly influenced by Kobori Enshu, Japan's most famous garden designer, is a "stroll garden" in which each turn of the path brings an entirely new view.

The first thing you notice upon entering Katsura is its simplicity—the buildings were all made of natural materials, and careful attention was paid to the slopes of the roofs and to the grain, texture, and color of the various woods used. A pavilion for moon viewing, a hall for imperial visits, a teahouse, and other buildings are situated around a pond; as you walk along the pathway, you're treated to views that literally change with each step you take. Islets; stone lanterns; various scenes representing seashores, mountains, and hamlets; manicured trees; and bridges of stone, earth, or wood that arch gracefully over the water—everything is perfectly balanced. No matter where you stand, the view is complete and in harmony. Every detail was carefully planned down to the stones used in the path, the way the trees twist, and how scenes are reflected in the water. Little wonder the Katsura Imperial Villa has influenced architecture not only in Japan but around the world. Sadly, tours are much too hurried (they last only 1 hr.), and no photography is allowed.

SHUGAKUIN IMPERIAL VILLA ★★ Northeast of Kyoto, about a 40-minute bus ride from Kyoto Station (take bus no. 5 from Kyoto Station to the Shugakuin Rikyu-michi bus stop) and then a 15-minute walk, this villa was built in the mid-1600s as a retirement retreat for Emperor Go-Mizunoo, who came to the throne at age 15 and suddenly abdicated 18 years later to become a monk, passing the throne to his daughter in 1629. Amazingly, though the villa was only 2 hours from the Imperial Palace, the emperor came here only on day trips; he never once spent the night. The 53-hectare (133-acre) grounds, among Kyoto's largest, are situated at the foot of Mount Hiei and are famous for the principle known as "borrowed landscape" in which the surrounding landscape is incorporated in the overall garden design. Grounds are divided into three levels (only two of which have compelling features): The **upper garden**, with its lake, islands, and waterfalls, is the most extensive of the three and offers grand views of the surrounding countryside from its hillside pavilion. The **middle garden**, built as a residence for the emperor's daughter, contains a villa with the famous "Shelves of Mist"; in keeping with the Japanese penchant for ranking the best three of everything, this is considered one of the three most beautiful shelves in Japan. The gardens are more spacious and natural than most Japanese-style gardens, which are often small and contrived. Tours, which take 1 hour and 15 minutes and cover almost 3.2km (2 miles), allow ample time for photography.

SAIHOJI ★★ Popularly known as **Kokedera (Moss Temple)**, Saihoji was converted into a Zen temple in 1339 and is famous for its velvety-green moss garden spread underneath the trees. Altogether, there are more than 100 different varieties of moss throughout the grounds, with popular names like "velvet moss," "water moss," and "snake-stomach moss." They give off an iridescent and mysterious glow that's best just after a rain; indeed, Kyoto's rainy season and high summer humidity create the perfect breeding ground for moss. Before being allowed to visit the grounds, tour participants must first listen to a lecture (in Japanese).

Note: Because the monks are afraid that huge numbers of visitors will trample the moss to death, permission is needed to visit Saihoji, and you can obtain it only by writing to the temple at least 10 days in advance. Write to Saihoji Temple, 56 Jigatani-cho, Matsuo, Nishikyo-ku, Kyoto 615-8286 (☎ 075/391-3631), and give your name, your address in Japan, your age, your occupation, and the date you'd like to visit (plus 2nd and 3rd choices). Include a self-addressed return envelope and International Reply Coupons for return postage. (If you're in Japan, you should send a double postcard or *ofuku hagaki*.) The cost of the visit, which includes a sutra-writing demonstration, is a "donation" of at least ¥3,000 (\$25; no change given), payable when you pick up your ticket. To reach Saihoji, take the Karasuma subway line to Shijo Station, transferring there to bus no. 29 to the Kokedera-michi stop.

BYODOIN TEMPLE ★ Located in the town of Uji, about 18km (11 miles) southeast of Kyoto, Byodoin Temple (☎ 0774/21-2861) is a good example of temple architecture of the Heian Period. Originally a villa, it was converted into a temple in 1053. Most famous is the main hall, known as **Phoenix Hall**, the only original building remaining. It has three wings, creating an image of the mythical bird of China, the phoenix; on the gable ends are two bronze phoenixes. On the temple grounds is one of the most famous bells in Japan (a National Treasure, there are no inscriptions on the bell, but it has reliefs of maidens and lions and is thought to contain Korean influences) as well as a monument to Minamoto Yorimasa, who took his own life here after being defeated by

the rival Taira clan. Byodoin is best known to Japanese, however, for gracing the back of ¥10 coins. Byodoin is about a 10-minute walk from the Uji JR Station (there's a map of the town in front of the station). Admission to the grounds is ¥600 (\$5), ¥500 (\$4.15) more for Phoenix Hall. Open daily 9am to 5pm (to 4pm in winter).

FUSHIMI-INARI SHRINE ★ Just a minute's walk from the JR Inari Station, Fushimi-Inari Shrine (☎ 075/641-7331) has long been popular with merchants, who come here to pray for success and prosperity. One of Japan's most celebrated Shinto shrines, it was founded back in 711 and is dedicated to the goddess of rice (rice was collected as taxes during the shogun era). The 4km (2½-mile) pathway behind the shrine is lined with more than 10,000 red torii gates, presented by worshippers throughout the ages; there are also stone foxes, which are considered messengers of the gods. It's a glorious—almost surreal—walk as you wind through the woods and the tunnel of vermilion-colored torii gates and then gradually climb a hill, where you'll have a good view of Kyoto. At several places along the path are small shops where you can sit down for a bowl of noodles or other refreshments. Admission is free, and the expansive grounds never close. The most popular times to visit are the first day of each month and New Year's.

Note: Both Byodoin Temple and Fushimi-Inari Shrine are on the same JR line that continues to Nara. If you plan on spending the night in Nara, you could easily take in these two attractions on the way.

7 Shopping Kyoto

As the nation's capital for more than 1,000 years, Kyoto spawned a number of crafts and exquisite art forms that catered to the elaborate tastes of the imperial court and the upper classes. Kyoto today is still renowned for its **crafts**, including Nishijin textiles, Yuzen-dyed fabrics, Kyo pottery (pottery fired in Kyoto), fans, dolls, cutlery, gold-leaf work, umbrellas, paper lanterns, combs, Noh masks, cloisonné, and lacquerware.

GREAT SHOPPING AREAS The majority of Kyoto's tiny specialty shops are situated in central Kyoto along Shijo Dori and in the area of Kawaramachi Dori. The square formed by **Kawaramachi Dori**, **Shijo Dori**, **Sanjo Dori**, and **Teramachi Dori** includes two covered shopping arcades and specialized shops selling lacquerware, combs and hairpins, knives and swords, tea and tea-ceremony implements, and more—including, of course, clothing and accessories.

If you're looking for antiques, woodblock prints, and art galleries, head toward **Shinmonzen Dori** and **Furumonzen Dori** in Gion, which parallel Shijo Dori to the north on the eastern side of the Kamo River. You'll find pottery and souvenir shops in abundance on the roads leading to Kiyomizu Temple in **Higashiyama-ku**.

For clothing, accessories, and modern goods, Kyoto's many **department stores** are good bets. They're conveniently located near Kyoto Station or in the heart of Nakagyo-ku near the Shijo-Kawaramachi intersection. In addition, there's a big underground shopping mall called **Porta** that radiates from the Karasuma (north) side of Kyoto Station; its boutiques sell everything from clothing and shoes to stationery. And inside Kyoto Station itself, **The Cube** shopping mall, in the first and second basements, has dozens of boutiques selling clothing and accessories as well as local souvenirs and crafts.

CRAFTS & SPECIALTY SHOPS

103 Aritsugu The fact that this family-owned business is located at the Nishiki-Koji market is appropriate since it sells hand-wrought knives and other handmade cooking implements, including sushi knives, bamboo steamers, pots, pans, and cookware used in the preparation of traditional Kyoto cuisine. In business for 400 years, the shop counts the city's top chefs among its customers. It also sells ikebana scissors. Open daily 9am to 5:30pm. Nishiki-Koji Dori, Gokomachi Nishi-iru, Nakagyo-ku. ☎ **075/221-1091**. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (5 min). 1 block north of Shijo Dori on the north side of Nishiki-Koji Dori, west of Gokomachi.

Kasagen Kasagen has been making traditional umbrellas (*bangasa*) since 1861. They're more expensive than elsewhere but are of high quality and are made to last a lifetime. Open Thursday to Tuesday 10am to 8pm. 284 Gion-machi, Kitagawa. ☎ **075/561-2832**. Bus: 100, 206, or 208 to Gion. On the north side of Shijo Dori, just west of Yasaka Shrine.

Kikuya Kikuya has a good selection of used kimono, *haori* (short kimono-like jackets, traditionally worn by men), geta, and kimono accessories for both adults and children. Although they're not antiques as Kikuya advertises but second-hand, the goods here are beautiful and timeless. Everything is in good condition (Japanese wear kimono only for special occasions), but be sure to look thoroughly for any defects. Prices seem high; expect to pay ¥3,000 (\$25) for a silk haori or a child's kimono. No credit cards are accepted. Open Monday to Saturday 9am to 7pm. On Manjuji Dori, east of Sakaimachi. ☎ **075/351-0033**. Take the Keihan Electric Line to Gojo (5 min.).

Kyoto Ceramics Center (Kyoto Tojiki Kaikan) This two-story shop is operated by an association of Kyoto potters who display their wares of Kyo pottery (pottery fired locally). Approximately 10,000 items are on display, from sake cups and vases to bowls, plates, and chopstick rests. Daily 9:30am to 5pm. ☎ **075/541-1102**. Bus: 80, 100, 202, 206, or 207 to Gojo-zaka (2 min.). On Gojo-zaka on the way to Kiyomizu Temple.

Kyoto Craft Center Whereas the Kyoto Handicraft Center (below) is good for souvenirs and inexpensive gifts for the folks back home, this crafts center is the kind of place to which you head to buy a wedding gift or something really special for yourself. Featuring beautifully designed contemporary crafts by local and famous artisans, the Kyoto Craft Center devotes its two floors to a wide range of products, including jewelry, scarves, pottery, glass, fans, damascene, baskets, and much more. Since the products are continually changing, there's always something new. Open Thursday to Tuesday 11am to 7pm. 275 Gion, Kitagawa, Higashiyama-ku. ☎ **075/561-9660**. Bus: 12, 31, 46, 80, 100, 201, 202, 203, 206, or 207 to Gion (3 min.). On Shijo Dori east of the Kamo River in the heart of Gion.

Kyoto Handicraft Center For one-stop souvenir shopping, your best bet is Kyoto's largest craft, gift, and souvenir center. Five floors of merchandise contain almost everything Japanese imaginable: pearls, lacquerware, dolls, children's toys, kimono (including antique kimono), woodblock prints, pottery, cameras, paper products, swords, lanterns, silk and textile goods, painted scrolls, and music boxes—and that's just for starters. You can even buy the socks to be worn with geta wooden shoes and the obi sashes to be worn with the kimono.

You can easily spend an hour or two here just wandering around; artisans also demonstrate their various crafts, including woodblock printing and the production of damascene. You can even try your own hand at making woodblock

prints, cloisonné, and dolls, with instruction provided. For this you should plan at least 1 hour; bookings are made at the information counter on the ground floor from 1 to 4pm daily. Lessons cost ¥1,500 (\$13) and are a great way for older children to get creative while you shop. And if you spend more yen than you have, you can exchange money here at a favorable rate. Open daily from 10am to 6pm. Kumano Jinja Higashi, Sakyo-ku. ☎ 075/761-5080. Bus: 31, 93, 201, 202, 203, 204, or 206 to Kumano-jinja-mae (3 min.). Free hourly bus service (on the hour except noon) from the center to major hotels throughout Kyoto. Just north of Heian Shrine on Marutamachi Dori.

⑩④ **Miyawaki Baisen-an** This elegant, open-fronted shop has specialized in handmade fans since 1823, particularly fans characteristic of Kyoto. A little English is spoken. Prices range from ¥2,800 (\$23) for a small tea-ceremony fan to ¥370,000 (\$3,083) for the best that money can buy. Open daily 9am to 7pm. 102 Tominokoji-nishi, Rokkaku-dori, Nakagyo-ku. ☎ 075/221-0181. Subway: Karasuma Oike (6 min.). On Rokkaku-dori just west of Tominokoji.

Yamato Mingei-Ten This shop has been selling folk crafts and folk art from all over Japan for more than 5 decades, including ceramics, glassware, lacquerware, textiles, paper products, baskets, and other hand-crafted items. Open Wednesday to Monday 11am to 8pm. On Kawaramachi Dori (just north of Maruzen bookstore), Nakagyo-ku. ☎ 075/221-2641. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi.

DEPARTMENT STORES

Department stores are good places to shop for Japanese items and souvenirs, including pottery, lacquerware, and kimono as well as clothing and everyday items.

JR Kyoto Isetan, located in Kyoto Station (☎ 075/352-1111; open daily 10am–7:30pm; closed occasional Tues), is Kyoto's most fashionable department store for young people, specializing in women's imported and domestic clothing. Across the street is **Kintetsu**, Karasuma Dori (☎ 075/361-1111; open daily 10am–7:30pm; closed some Thurs), convenient for all those necessities from film to toiletries to food.

In Central Kyoto, **Daimaru**, on Shijo Dori west of Takakura (☎ 075/211-8111; open daily 10am–8pm), is Kyoto's largest department store, with everything from clothing to food to electronic goods spread on nine floors. Nearby are **Hankyu**, on the southeast corner of Shijo-Kawaramachi intersection (☎ 075/223-2288; open daily 10:30am–8pm; closed some Tues), with seven floors of fashion, housewares, and food; and **Takashimaya**, across the street at the southwest corner of the Shijo-Kawaramachi intersection (☎ 075/221-8811; open daily 10am–8pm; closed some Wed), one of Japan's oldest and most respected department stores with a good selection of traditional crafts.

MARKETS

On the 21st of each month, a flea market is held at **Toji Temple** (☎ 075/691-3325), about a 15-minute walk southwest of Kyoto Station. Japan's largest flea market, it's also one of the oldest; its history stretches back more than 700 years, when pilgrims began flocking to Toji Temple to pay their respects to Kobo Daishi, who founded the Shingon sect of Buddhism. Today, Toji Temple is still a center for the Shingon sect, and its market (popularly known as Kobo-san) is a colorful affair with booths selling Japanese antiques, old kimono, ethnic goods, odds and ends, and many other items. Worshippers come to pray before a statue of Kobo Daishi and to have their wishes written on wooden slats by temple calligraphers. Even if you don't buy anything, the festive atmosphere of the

market and booths makes a trip here a memorable experience. The largest Kobosan markets take place in December and January. All markets at Toji are held from about 6am to 4pm. A smaller market, devoted entirely to Japanese antiques, is held at Toji Temple on the first Sunday of each month.

Commemorating the scholar and poet Sugawara Michizane, the **Tenjin-san market** held at **Kitano Tenmangu Shrine** (☎ 075/461-0005) the 25th of every month is a large market offering a little bit of everything—antiques, used clothing, ceramics, food—in a beautiful setting. It's open from about 8am to dusk, but go as early as you can. Kitano Shrine is on Imadegawa Dori between Nishi-oji and Senbon; take the Chin-Chin bus no. 101 to the Kitano Tenmangu-mae stop.

Unlike the other temple markets, the **Chion-ji market** (☎ 075/691-3325), held the 15th of each month from 9am to 4pm, is devoted to handmade goods and crafts, including pottery and clothing. To reach it, take bus no. 206 to Hyakumanben at the Higashioji and Imadegawa intersection; **Chion-ji Temple** is just to the northeast.

Although you may not buy anything to take home with you, a stroll through the **Nishiki-Koji Dori market** is worthwhile just for the atmosphere. Kyoto's 400-year-old city produce market, this covered shopping arcade 1 block north of Shijo Dori in the heart of old Kyoto is lined with vendors selling fish, flowers, eggs, pickled vegetables, fruit, and takeout foods. It's open from 10am to about 6pm; some shops close on either Wednesday or Sunday.

8 Kyoto After Dark

Nothing beats a fine summer evening spent strolling the streets of Kyoto. From the geisha district of Gion to the bars and restaurants lining Pontocho, Kyoto is utterly charming and romantic at night. Begin with a walk along the banks of the Kamo River—it's a favorite place for young couples in love. In summer, restaurants stretching north and south of Shijo Dori along the river erect outdoor wooden platforms on stilts over the water.

FINDING OUT WHAT'S ON There are many annual events and dances, including the very popular geisha area dances held in June, the only time of year you can see traditional dances performed by all five of Kyoto's traditional geisha districts; Gion Odori dances in October featuring *geiko* and *maiko* (geisha and apprentice geisha in Kyoto) dressed in elaborate costume; and Kabuki at the Minamiza Theater in December. To find out what's happening while you're in Kyoto, pick up the monthly magazine **Kansai Time Out**, available in Kyoto at the Maruzen bookstore on Kawaramachi Dori for ¥300 (\$2.50). Although major concerts are infrequent in Kyoto (they're usually held in nearby Osaka), the magazine is the best source for finding out what's going on in the classical and contemporary music scene. In addition, the **Kyoto Visitor's Guide**, a monthly tabloid distributed free at tourist offices, hotels, and restaurants, contains a calendar of events and performances for the month, while the monthly giveaway **Kansai Scene** has information on nightlife and other events in Kyoto, Osaka, and Kobe.

THE MAJOR NIGHTLIFE DISTRICTS

GION ★★

A small neighborhood of plain wooden buildings in Higashiyama-ku on the eastern side of the Kamo River, Gion doesn't look anything like what you've probably come to expect from an urban Japanese nightlife district; in fact, there's

hardly any neon in sight. There's something almost austere and solemn about Kyoto's most famous geisha district, as though its *raison d'être* were infinitely more important and sacred than mere entertainment. Gion is a shrine to Kyoto's past, an era when geisha numbered in the thousands.

Contrary to popular Western misconceptions, geisha are not prostitutes. Rather, they're trained experts in the traditional arts, conversation, and coquettishness, and their primary role is to make men feel like kings when they're in the soothing enclave of the geisha house. There are now only a mere couple hundred geisha in Gion; after all, in today's high-tech world, few women are willing to undergo the years of rigorous training to learn how to conduct the tea ceremony, to play the *samisen* (a three-stringed instrument), or to perform ancient court dances.

Gion is about a 5-minute walk from the Shijo-Kawaramachi intersection; to reach it, walk east on Shijo Dori and then take a right on Hanamikoji Dori. Its narrow streets are great for strolling; a good time to take a walk through the neighborhood is around dusk when geisha are on their way to their evening appointments. Perhaps you'll see one—or a *maiko* (a young woman training to be a geisha)—clattering in her high wooden shoes (called *geta*). She'll be dressed in a brilliant kimono, her face a chalky white, and her hair adorned with hairpins and ornaments. From geisha houses, music and laughter lilt from behind paper screens, sounding all the more inviting because you can't enter. Don't take it personally; not even the Japanese will venture inside without the proper introductions. There are, however, an increasing number of bars and restaurants in Gion that are open to outsiders; it's not hard to imagine that in another 100 years, Gion will look no different from Tokyo's Ginza.

Gion Corner After strolling around Gion, visit Gion Corner, which stages special variety programs in the ancient cultural arts. You'll see short demonstrations of the tea ceremony, *ikebana* (flower arranging), *koto* (Japanese harp) music, *gagaku* (ancient court music and dance), *kyogen* (Noh comic play), *kyomai* (Kyoto-style dance) performed by maiko, and *bunraku* (puppetry). The shows cater to tourists, and none of the individual performances beat a full-scale production of the real thing, but this is a convenient and quick introduction to the traditional forms of Japanese entertainment. March 1 to November 29, programs are held daily (except Aug 16) at 7:40pm and 8:40pm. Reservations are not necessary, but arrive early. Yasaka Hall, Hanamikoji Dori, Shijo-sagaru, Gion. ☎ 075/561-1119. Tickets ¥2,800 (\$23); available at most hotels, travel agencies, and at Gion Corner box office. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (8 min.); or from other than Kyoto Station, 12, 46, 80, or 207 to Shijo Keihan-mae (4 min.). Located on Hanamikoji Dori south of Shijo Dori.

PONTOCHO

Pontocho is a narrow alley that parallels the Kamo River's western bank, stretching from Shijo Dori north to Sanjo Dori. Once riddled with geisha houses and other members-only establishments, it is now lined with bars, clubs, restaurants, and hostess bars that fill every nook and cranny. Pontocho makes for a fascinating walk as you watch groups of Japanese enjoying themselves.

Another good place to look for nightlife is **Kiyamachi**, a small street that parallels Pontocho to the west and that runs beside a small canal.

THE CLUB & LIVE MUSIC SCENE

Kento's Rather out of place in the Gion geisha district, this chain specializes in the oldies but goldies of the 1950s and 1960s performed by a live band, with

two sets nightly. Open daily 6:30 to 11:30pm. Hitotsume-nishi-iru, Hanamikoji Dori, Shijo-agaru. ☎ 075/551-2777. Cover ¥3,500 (\$29) for all-you-can-drink for 2 hours. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (5 min.); or from other than Kyoto Station, 12, 46, 80, or 207 to Shijo Keihan-mae (2 min.). From Shijo Dori, walk south on Hanamikoji Dori and take the 1st right.

Live Spot Rag Depending on who's playing, the crowd at one of Kyoto's longest-standing live clubs, established in 1981, ranges from an older, more mel-low audience to a younger, rowdier bunch. Mostly, however, it's a college-age crowd that comes here to listen to rock, jazz, acoustic, and fusion. Beer and snacks start at ¥600 (\$5). Open nightly from 6am to 3am, with live music 7:30 to 10:30pm. Empire Bldg., 5th floor, Kiyamachi Dori, Sanjo Agaru. ☎ 075/241-0446 (or 075/255-7273 10am–7pm). www.ragnet.co.jp. Live music cover ¥1,000–¥5,000 (\$8.35–\$42) depending on the band plus a 1-drink, 1-dish minimum. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (3 min.). Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Kawaramachi Sanjo (2 min.). On the east side of Kiyamachi north of Sanjo Dori.

THE BAR SCENE

Atlantis This bar opened more than a decade ago, but a recent makeover has turned a wallflower into Pontocho's most eye-catching bar, flashy and out of character with the rest of this narrow alley. Still, if all you want is a cocktail on a wooden veranda over the Kamo River and you're prepared to pay ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for it, this is the place. Veranda open daily 6 to 11pm, bar till 2am. Pontocho, Shijo-agaru. ☎ 075/221-3870. Bus: 5, 17, or 205 to Shijo Kawaramachi (3 min.). On Pontocho south of the playground.

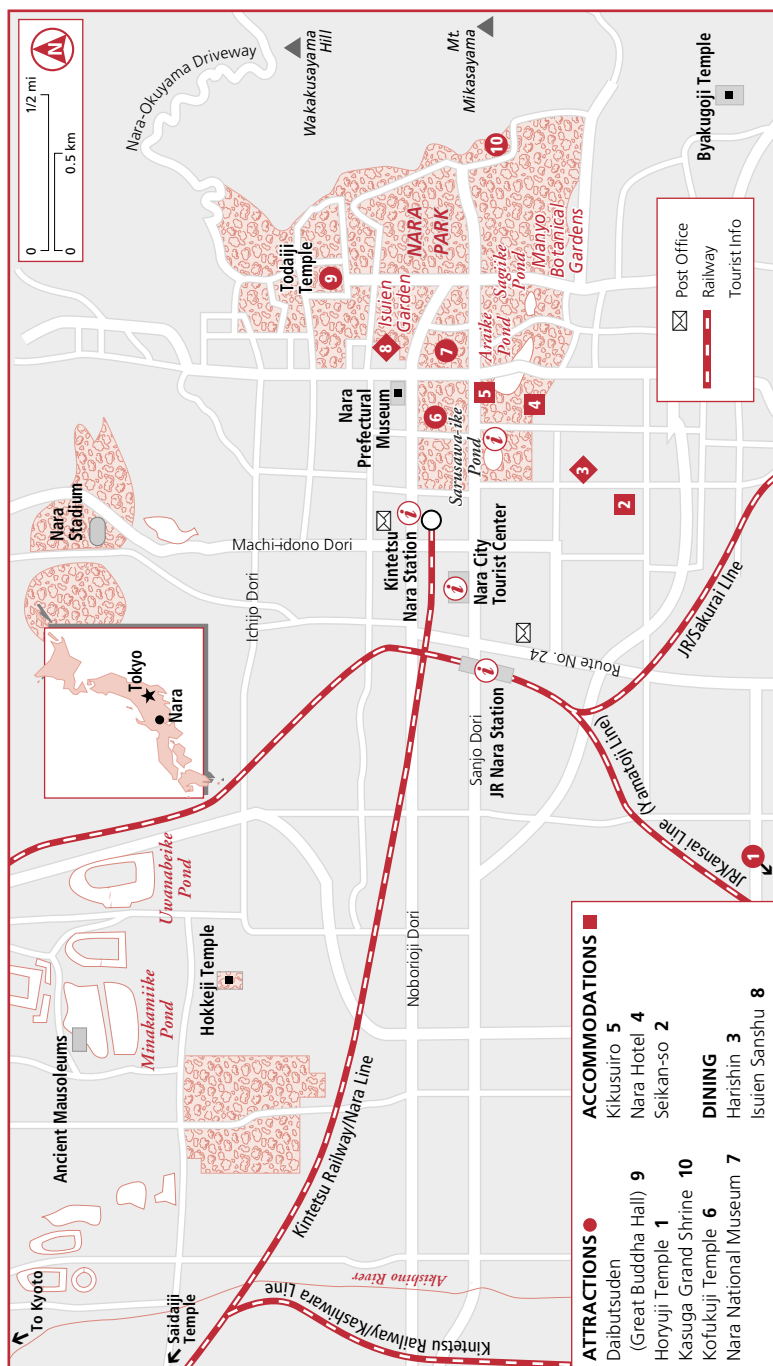
The Hill of Tara Live traditional Irish music is the main draw here Thursday from 8 to 10pm and Friday and Saturday from 9 to 11pm, but it's lively any day of the week at this popular pub. Open daily 5pm to midnight (to 1am Fri and Sat). Oike Dori, Kawaramachi-higashiiru. ☎ 075/213-3330. Subway: Kyoto Shiyakusho-mae (2 min.). Bus: 17 or 205 to Kawaramachi shiyakusho-mae (3 min.). On Oike Dori, beside the Kyoto Hotel.

Pig & Whistle Here's a traditional, noisy, and fun English pub where you can play darts, stand at the bar, or sit at a table with your mum. It attracts an older, mixed crowd of both foreigners and Japanese, including foreigners who are net-working for employment or business opportunities. Happy hour is from 5 to 7pm. Open nightly from 5pm to midnight (to 1am Fri and Sat). Shobi Bldg., 2nd floor, 115 Ohashi-cho, Ohashi, Higashi Iru, Sanjo Dori. ☎ 075/761-6022. Subway: Sanjo Keihan (2 min.). On the north side of Sanjo Dori, east of the Kamo River.

9 A Side Trip to Nara ★★

42km (26 miles) S of Kyoto

In the beginnings of Japanese history, the nation's capital was moved to a new site each time a new emperor came to the throne. In 710, however, the first permanent Japanese capital was set up at **Nara**. Not that it turned out to be so permanent—after only 74 years, the capital was moved first to Nagaoka and shortly thereafter to Kyoto, where it remained for more than 1,000 years. What's important about those 74 years, however, is that they witnessed the birth of Japan's arts, crafts, and literature, as Nara imported everything from religion to art and architecture from China. Even the city itself, laid out in a rectangular grid pattern, was modeled after Chinese concepts. It was during the Nara Period that Japan's first historical account, first mythological chronicle, and first poetry



anthology (with 4,173 poems) were written. Buddhism also flourished, and Nara grew as the political and cultural center of the land with numerous temples, shrines, pagodas, and palaces.

The Japanese flock to Nara because it gives them the feeling that they're communing with ancestors. Foreigners come here because Nara offers them a glimpse of a Japan that was. Remarkably enough, many of Nara's historic buildings and temples remain intact, and long ago someone had enough foresight to enclose many of these historical structures in the quiet and peaceful confines of a large and spacious park, which has the added attraction of free-roaming deer.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Nara is easily reached from Kyoto Station on two lines: the JR Nara Line and the Kintetsu Limited Express. If you have a Japan Rail Pass, you'll probably want to take the commuter **JR Nara Line**, which departs about four times an hour and takes 40 to 60 minutes depending on the train; if you don't have a pass, the trip costs ¥690 (\$5.75) one-way. If speed or luxury is of the utmost importance, the deluxe **Kintetsu Limited Express** whisks you to Nara in 34 minutes, guarantees you a seat (all seats are reserved), and costs ¥1,110 (\$9.25) one-way; departures are every 30 minutes, usually on the hour and half-hour (if it's peak season, it's a good idea to buy your ticket in advance). A slower **Kintetsu ordinary express** takes 45 minutes and costs ¥610 (\$5.10).

You can also reach Nara from Osaka in about 30 to 50 minutes, depending on the train and the station from which you leave. The **Kintetsu Nara Line**, departing from Namba Station, takes 40 minutes and costs ¥540 (\$4.50) one-way.

VISITOR INFORMATION Pick up brochures and information on Nara before leaving Kyoto at the **Tourist Information Center (TIC)** across from Kyoto Station's Karasuma exit. The Kyoto map distributed there, called the "Tourist Map of Kyoto/Nara," has a good map of Nara on the reverse side (the Kyoto map distributed by the local Kyoto City Tourist Information Office does not). Be sure to also pick up the leaflet "Nara Walks."

In Nara itself, there are tourist information offices at both **JR Nara Station** (☎ 0742/22-9821; open daily 9am–5pm) and **Kintetsu Nara Station** (☎ 0742/24-4858; open daily 9am–5pm). Both have good brochures and maps with useful information on how to get around Nara by foot and bus. For more detailed information on Nara, visit the **Nara City Tourist Center**, 23–4 Kami-sanjo-cho (☎ 0742/22-3900; open daily 9am–9pm), located in the heart of the city on Sanjo Dori between both stations and about a 5-minute walk from each. Finally, there's **Sarusawa Information Center** (☎ 0742/26-1991; open daily 9am–5pm), located at Sarusawa-ike Pond, south of Nara Park and not far from Nara's many attractions.

GETTING AROUND If you take the Kintetsu Line, you'll arrive at **Kintetsu Nara Station**; if you take the JR train, you'll arrive at **JR Nara Station**. Both stations are about a 10-minute walk from each other and are within walking distance of Nara Park and its attractions. Kintetsu Station is slightly closer, about a 5-minute walk to the entrance of the park, while the JR Station is about a 10-minute walk to the park. Keep in mind, however, that Nara Park is quite large and its major attractions are far-flung; it takes about 20 minutes to walk from Kintetsu Nara Station to Todaiji Temple. Around the stations themselves is Nara's small downtown area, with Sanjo Dori serving as the main shopping street and running from JR Nara Station to Nara Park.

IF YOU'RE HEADING TO HORYUJI If you plan to visit the Horyuji Temple Area (see below), the cheapest and fastest way to get there is from JR Nara Station on the JR Kansai Yamatoji Line going in the direction of Namba in Osaka; departures are every 10 minutes or so and bring you to Horyuji Station in 12 minutes (fare: ¥210/\$1.75). From there, you can either walk to the temple area in about 20 minutes or take the bus (¥170/\$1.40), which departs two to three times an hour.

Or, from either the JR or Kintetsu Nara Station, you can take bus no. 60, which departs once an hour and takes 39 minutes to reach the Horyuji-mae stop. Obviously, since it takes quite a bit of time getting to and from Horyuji, you must limit your sightseeing to only the major attractions if you plan on visiting both Nara Park and Horyuji in 1 day.

GUIDED TOURS OF NARA **Goodwill Guides** will be glad to show you the sights in exchange for the chance to practice their English. A national organization of volunteers, Goodwill Guides range from students and housewives to retired people. One guide each is often posted at both the JR and Kintetsu Station tourist offices and is available to the first tourists who show up any day except Sunday. But if you want to be assured of having a guide, make reservations in advance by calling ☎ 0742/45-5920 at least the day before to arrange a time. Guides are available daily from 9am to 5pm. There's no charge for these personal guides, but you are requested to pay their transportation to meet you, and I suggest you also pay for the guide's lunch (guides do not have to pay admission fares to attractions).

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The best way to enjoy Nara is to arrive early in the morning before the first tour buses start pulling in. If you don't have much time, the most important sites to see are **Todaiji Temple**, **Kasuga Shrine**, and **Kofukuji Temple's Treasure House**, which you can view in about 3 hours. If you have more time, add **Horyuji Temple**.

AROUND NARA PARK

With its ponds, grassy lawns, trees, and temples, Nara Park covers about 520 hectares (1,300 acres) and is home to more than 1,000 deer, which are considered divine messengers and are therefore allowed to roam freely through the park. The deer are generally quite friendly; throughout the park you can buy "deer cookies," which all but the shyest fawns will usually take right out of your hand. All of the below listings are within Nara Park.

Kofukuji Temple ★ As you walk east from either the JR or Kintetsu Station, this is the first temple you reach. It was established in 710 as the family temple of the Fujiwaras, the second-most powerful clan after the imperial family from the 8th to 12th centuries. At one time as many as 175 buildings were erected on the Kofukuji Temple grounds, giving it significant religious and political power up until the 16th century; through centuries of civil wars and fires, however, most of the structures were destroyed. Only a handful of buildings remain, but even these were rebuilt after the 13th century. The **five-story pagoda**, first erected in 730, was burned down five times. The present pagoda dates from 1426 and is an exact replica of the original; at 49m (164 ft.) tall, it's the second-tallest pagoda in Japan (the tallest is at Toji Temple in Kyoto). Also of historic importance is the **Eastern Golden Hall (Tokondo)**, originally constructed in 726 by Emperor Shomu to speed the recovery of the ailing Empress Gensho.

Rebuilt in 1415, it houses several priceless images, including a bronze statue of Yakushi Nyorai, a Buddha believed to cure illnesses, which was installed by Emperor Shomu on behalf of his sick wife; a 12th-century wooden Bodhisattva of wisdom, long worshipped by scholar monks and today by pupils hopeful of passing university entrance exams; and guardians and assistants of Yakushi. But the best thing to see here is the temple's **Treasure House (Kokuhokan)** 宝蔵庫, which displays many statues and works of art originally contained in the temple's buildings, many of them National Treasures. Most famous are a statue of Ashura carved in the 8th century and a bronze head of Yakushi Nyorai, but my favorites are the 12th-century carved wooden statues representing priests of the Kamakura Period with fascinating facial features that render them strikingly human.

☎ 0742/22-7755. Treasure House ¥500 (\$4.50) adults, ¥400 (\$3.60) junior-high and high-school students, ¥150 (\$1.35) elementary-school students; Eastern Golden Hall ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) junior-high and high-school students, ¥100 (85¢) elementary-school students. Daily 9am–5pm.

Nara National Museum (Nara Kokuritsu Hakubutsukan) 奈良国立博物館 To the east of Kofukuji, this museum opened in 1895 to house invaluable Buddhist art and archaeological relics and has since expanded into a second building. Many masterpieces originally contained in Nara's many temples are now housed here, including Buddhist sculptures from various periods in Japan's history, paintings, masks, scrolls, calligraphy, roof tiles, and archaeological objects obtained from temple ruins, tombs, and sutra mounds. Unfortunately, although items are identified in English, explanations of their historical significance are not.

☎ 0742/22-7771. Admission ¥420 (\$3.50) adults, ¥130 (\$1.10) high-school and college students, ¥70 (60¢) junior-high and elementary students. Higher admission during special exhibitions. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm.

Todaiji Temple 東大寺 Nara's premier attraction is Todaiji Temple and its **Daibutsu (Great Buddha)**. When Emperor Shomu ordered construction of both the temple and Daibutsu back in the mid-700s, he intended to make Todaiji the headquarters of all Buddhist temples in the land. As part of his plans for a Buddhist utopia, he commissioned work for this huge bronze statue of Buddha; it took eight castings to complete this remarkable work of art, which remains the largest bronze statue of Buddha in Japan. At a height of more than 15m (50 ft.), the Daibutsu is made of 437 tons of bronze, 286 pounds of pure gold, 165 pounds of mercury, and 7 tons of vegetable wax. However, thanks to Japan's frequent natural calamities, the Buddha of today isn't quite what it used to be. In 855, in what must have been a whopper of an earthquake, the statue lost its head. It was repaired in 861, but alas, the huge wooden building housing the Buddha was burned twice during wars, melting the Buddha's head. The present head dates from 1692.

The wooden structure housing the Great Buddha, called **Daibutsuden**, was destroyed several times through the centuries; the present structure dates from 1709. Measuring 48m (161 ft.) tall, 56m (187 ft.) long, and 49m (164 ft.) wide, it's the largest wooden structure in the world—but is only two-thirds its original size. Be sure to walk in a circle around the Great Buddha to see it from all angles. Behind the statue is a model of how the Daibutsuden used to look, flanked by two massive pagodas as well as a huge wooden column with a small hole in it near the ground. According to popular belief, if you can manage to crawl through this opening, you'll be sure to reach enlightenment (seemingly a snap for children). You can also get your fortune in English for ¥150 (\$1.25) by

shaking a bamboo canister until a wooden stick with a number comes out; the number corresponds to a piece of paper. Mine told me that though I will win, it will be of no use, an illness will be serious, and the person for whom I am waiting will not come. And the monk who gave me the fortune said mine was a good one!

📍 0742/22-5511. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Open daily: Mar 8am–5pm; Apr–Sept 7:30am–5:30pm; Oct 7:30am–5pm; Nov–Feb 8am–4:30pm.

Kasuga Grand Shrine ⚡⚡ A stroll through the park will bring you to one of my favorite Shinto shrines in all Japan. Originally the tutelary shrine of the powerful Fujiwara family, it was founded in 768 and, according to Shinto concepts of purity, was torn down and rebuilt every 20 years in its original form until 1863. Since virtually all empresses hailed from the Fujiwara family, the shrine enjoyed a privileged status with the imperial family. Nestled in the midst of verdant woods, it's a shrine of vermilion-colored pillars and an astounding 3,000 stone and bronze lanterns. The most spectacular time to visit is mid-August or the beginning of February, when all 3,000 lanterns are lit. Here, too, you can pay ¥200 (\$1.65) for an *onikuji*, a slip of paper on which your fortune is written in English. If the fortune is unfavorable, you can conveniently negate it by tying the piece of paper to the twig of a tree. Although admission to the grounds is free, if you want a closer view of the bronze lanterns (perhaps to photograph them) and the worship hall, pay the admission charge to the inner grounds.

📍 0742/22-7788. Free admission to grounds; inner grounds ¥420 (\$3.50) adults, ¥315 (\$2.60) high and junior-high school students, ¥210 (\$1.75) elementary students. Daily 9am–4:30pm (4pm in winter).

THE HORYUJI TEMPLE AREA ⚡⚡⚡

Founded in 607 by Prince Shotoku as a center for Buddhism in Japan, **Horyuji Temple** (📍 07457/5-2555) is one of Japan's most significant gems for historic architecture, art, and religion. It was from here that Buddhism blossomed and spread throughout the land. Today about 45 buildings remain, some of them dating from the end of the 7th century and comprising what are probably the oldest wooden structures in the world. Although they are the main reason people come here, it's the atmosphere of the compound itself that I love—serene, ancient, and a fitting tribute to Prince Shotoku, founder of Buddhism in Japan and much revered still today. Little wonder Horyuji was selected as Japan's first UNESCO World Cultural Heritage Site, in 1993 (for details on reaching Horyuji, see “Essentials,” above).

At the western end of the grounds is the two-story, 17m (58-ft.) high **Kondo**, or main hall, which is considered the oldest building at Horyuji Temple, erected sometime between the 6th and 8th centuries. It contains Buddhas commemorating Prince Shotoku's parents, protected by Japan's oldest set of four heavenly guardians (from the late 7th or early 8th c.). Next to the main hall is Japan's oldest **five-story pagoda**, dating from the foundation of the temple and considered the most important structure of Buddhist temples, since it is here that relics of the Buddha are enshrined; it contains four scenes from the life of Buddha. The **Gallery of Temple Treasures**, or Daihozoden, constructed in 1998, contains statues, tabernacles, and other works of art from the 7th and 8th centuries, many of them National Treasures. On the eastern precincts of Horyuji Temple is an octagonal building called **Yumedono Hall**, or the Hall of Visions, built in 739 as a sanctuary to pray for the repose of Prince Shotoku.

Admission to Kondo, Gallery of Temple Treasures, and Yumedono Hall is ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults and ¥500 (\$4.15) for children. The grounds are open daily from 8am to 5pm (to 4:30pm Nov 4–Feb 21).

Just behind Yumedono is ⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ **Chuguji Temple** (☎ 07457/5-2106), once part of a large nunnery built for members of the imperial family. It contains two outstanding national treasures. The wooden statue of **Nyoirin Kannon Bosatsu**, dating from the 7th century, is noted for the serene and compassionate expression on her face. The **Tenjukoku Mandala**, the oldest piece of embroidery in Japan, was originally 4.8m (16 ft.) long and was created by Shotoku's consort and her female companions after Shotoku's death at the age of 48. It shows scenes from the Land of Heavenly Longevity, where only those with good karma are invited by the Buddha in the afterlife and where Shotoku surely resides. Only a replica of the fragile embroidery is now on display. Open daily from 9am to 4:30pm (to 4pm Oct 1–Mar 20); admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥250 (\$2.10) for children.

WHERE TO STAY

⁽¹⁰⁶⁾ **Kikusuiro** ★★☆☆ You can't find a more beautiful example of a Japanese-style ryokan than this lovely 130-year-old inn, an imposing structure with an ornate Japanese-style roof surrounded by a white wall. The ryokan has been designated a private cultural asset by the Ministry of Culture. Rooms, some of which face Ara-ike Pond, are outfitted with scrolls and antiques and are connected to one another with rambling wooden corridors. There's also a beautiful garden. The manager, Mr. Itoh, speaks English.

1130 Takahata-cho Bodaimachi, Nara 630-8301. ☎ 0742/23-2001. Fax 0742/26-0025. 14 units (8 with bathroom). ¥30,000–¥40,000 (\$250–\$333) per person. Rates include 2 meals. DC, MC, V. South of Nara Park's Kofukuji 5-story pagoda on Sanjo Dori (Rte. 308); a 10-min. walk from Kintetsu Nara Station, 15 min. from JR Nara Station. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Western, Japanese); in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

Nara Hotel ★★☆☆ One of the most famous places to stay in Nara (and with a front-desk staff eager to please), the Nara Hotel sits like a palace atop a hill overlooking several ponds. Built in 1909 in the Momoyama Period style of architecture and similar to Japan's other hotels built around the turn of the 20th century to accommodate the foreigners who poured into the country following the Meiji Restoration, it's constructed as a Western-style hotel but has many Japanese features. Photographs of visiting imperial family members adorn the walls. You have your choice of accommodations in the old section of the hotel with its wide corridors, high ceilings, antique light fixtures, fireplaces (no longer in use), and comfortable old-fashioned decor, or in the new addition, which opened in 1984 and offers larger modern rooms with dataports and verandas overlooking the old town. I personally prefer the atmosphere of the older rooms—those facing the city are less expensive than those in the new wing, while the higher-priced ones have a view of the pond or park.

Nara-Koennai, Nara 630-8301. ☎ 0742/26-3300. Fax 0742/23-5252. 132 units. ¥14,000 (\$117) single; ¥23,000–¥27,000 (\$192–\$225) double; ¥22,000–¥50,000 (\$183–\$417) twin. 10% discount for holders of Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. About a 4-min. walk south of Nara Park; an 8-min. taxi ride from the train station. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Western); bar; souvenir shop; room service (4–10:30pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Seikan-so ★★ (Value) This is a lovely choice in inexpensive Japanese-style accommodations. It boasts the most beautiful garden of any Japanese Inn Group member I've seen, complete with azalea bushes and manicured trees—the kind of garden usually found only at ryokan costing twice as much. Located in a quiet neighborhood about a 10-minute walk south of Nara Park, it dates from 1916 and is owned by a friendly couple who speak English. The traditional Japanese building wraps around the inner garden. Unfortunately, the rooms are beginning to show their age, but all is forgiven if you can get one of the six facing the garden—be sure to request one when making your reservation. A Japanese or Western breakfast is available.

29 Higashi-Kitsuji-cho, Nara 630-8327. ☎ 0742/22-2670. Fax 0742/22-2670. seikanso@chive.ocn.ne.jp. 9 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) per person. Discounts available for children under 10. Breakfast ¥450–¥700 (\$3.75–\$5.85) extra. AE, MC, V. Loop bus 1 to Kitayobate stop (1 min.), or a 12-min. walk from Kintetsu Nara Station, 25 min. from JR Nara Station. **Amenities:** Nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

107 Harishin ★★ (Finds) OBENTO Many tourists never see this lovely part of old Nara near Gangoji Temple, which consists of narrow lanes and traditional wooden homes and shops. The restaurant itself is a 200-year-old house of ochre-colored walls and a wood-slat facade, and dining is on tatami with a view of a garden. Only a mini-kaiseki meal and an obento that change with the season, the creation of chef-owner Nakagawa-san, are served. On my last visit, my obento included an aperitif wine, light tofu flavored with sesame, soup, rice, pickled vegetables, tempura, and various exquisitely prepared bite-size morsels of shrimp, chicken, potatoes wrapped in bacon, and scallops. A meal here is highly recommended.

15 Nakashinya-cho. ☎ 0742/22-2669. Obento ¥2,500 (\$21), mini-kaiseki ¥3,500 (\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11:30am–2:30pm and 6–8pm (last order); if Mon is a national holiday, open Mon and closed Tues. A 5-min. walk south of Sarusawa-ike Pond on the road that leads south from the east edge of the pond (stop at the tourist office for directions).

Isuien Sanshyu ★★ EEL Isuien Garden, established during the Edo Period and enlarged a century ago by a Nara merchant, is a strolling garden that uses the principles of borrowed landscape, incorporating the hills of Kasuga and Wakayama in its design. While nothing spectacular, it does have a wonderful thatched-roof restaurant overlooking part of the garden and a pond—a great, traditional place for a meal. It serves only one thing, a set meal of eel (*unagi*) basted with a yam paste, soup, rice, and pickled vegetables—considered very healthy. If you wish, you can pay the extra admission to see the entire garden (¥600/\$5 for adults), but there are better gardens in Kyoto.

Isuien Garden, 74 Suimoncho. ☎ 0742/22-2173. Eel set meal ¥2,400 (\$20). No credit cards. Wed–Mon 11:30am–1:30pm. North of Nara Park. Take the road between Kofukuji Temple and Nara National Museum (Rte. 369) north in the direction of Kyoto; after passing the busy street, take the 1st right. Isuien is at the end of this street.

The Rest of Western Honshu

In addition to Tokyo, Kyoto, and the Japan Alps, the island of Honshu has numerous other cities, towns, and attractions in its western half that are well worth a visit. As the largest of Japan's islands and home to 80% of the country's population, Honshu is where most of the country's important historical events took place; you'll find many castles, gardens, temples, shrines,

and other famous sights linked to the past here. Honshu's climate ranges from snowy winters in the north and in its mountain ranges to subtropical weather in the south. The middle of the island is traversed by Japan's longest river, the Shinano. With all this to offer, it's little wonder that many travelers to Japan never make it off this central island.

1 Nagoya

366km (227 miles) W of Tokyo; 147km (92 miles) E of Kyoto; 186km (116 miles) E of Osaka

Nagoya was founded as a castle town more than 390 years ago on orders of Tokugawa Ieyasu, who considered its strategic position on the Tokaido Highway useful for controlling Osaka and other points west. Today, Nagoya is Japan's fourth-largest city with a population of 2.19 million—yet it's a place most foreigners never stop to see. True, it doesn't have the attractions of many of the nation's other cities, but it does have a castle originally built by the first Tokugawa shogun, as well as one of Japan's most important Shinto shrines. You can also stroll through an aquarium famous for its penguins and sea turtles, visit the world-famous Noritake chinaware display rooms, spend hours at an open-air architectural museum (one of my favorites in Japan), and watch cormorant fishing in summer. Nagoya, capital of Aichi Prefecture, also serves as the gateway to Takayama in the Japan Alps (see the "Takayama, Little Kyoto of the Mountains" section in chapter 6) and Ise-Shima National Park (covered later in this chapter). In 2005, the World Expo will be held just outside Nagoya.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane If you arrive at **Nagoya International Airport** on a domestic or international flight, you can take the airport shuttle bus to the **Melsa Meitetsu Bus Center**, in front of the Sakura Dori exit of Nagoya train station, for ¥870 (\$7.25). Buses depart daily every 10 minutes from 8:20am to 10:05pm for the 30-minute ride. The new Central Japan International Airport, nicknamed Centrair and located on a man-made island, is slated to open in 2005.

By JR Train The Shinkansen bullet train to **JR Nagoya Station** takes approximately 2 hours from Tokyo, 40 minutes from Kyoto, and 1 hour from Shin-Osaka Station. The fare from Tokyo Station is ¥10,070 (\$84) for an unreserved seat.

By Bus From Shinjuku Station in Tokyo, the Chuo Line bus charges ¥5,100 (\$43) one-way for the 6-hour trip, with several departures daily. From Kyoto, the Tomei Highway Bus costs ¥2,500 (\$21) and takes 2¾ hours; from Osaka, the trip takes just over 3 hours and costs ¥2,900 (\$24).

VISITOR INFORMATION Before departing Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai international airports, stop by the Tourist Information Center for the leaflet “Nagoya and Vicinity,” which contains a city map and transportation and sightseeing information. In Nagoya Station, you can pick up a map and the *Nagoya Visitors Guide* at the **Nagoya Tourist Information Center** (☎ 052/541-4301; open daily 9am–7pm) in the central concourse, opposite the Central exit wickets of the JR Line; look for the ? and JR signs.

For more detailed information about Nagoya, walk 8 minutes from Nagoya Station’s Central exit straight down Sakura Dori (or take the subway one stop to Kokusai Center Station) to the **Nagoya International Center** on the third floor of the Nagoya International Center Building, 1-47-1 Nagono (☎ 052/581-0100; open Tues–Sat 9am–8:30pm, Sun and holidays 9am–5pm; closed 2nd Sun in Feb and Aug). It’s one of Japan’s best facilities for foreign visitors and residents, with an English-speaking staff, a lounge area with a TV featuring CNN newscasts, Internet access, and lots of information on the city, including the free monthly publications *Nagoya Calendar* and *Avenues*. The center also advises foreign residents on how to get a visa, where to find an apartment, and which doctors speak English. On the fourth floor, you can apply to visit a Japanese family in their home in the local **Home Visit** system. You must apply in person no later than 5pm the day before you wish to visit; be sure to bring your passport. Call ☎ 052/581-5689 for details.

For recorded information in English on events, concerts, festivals, and the arts, call ☎ 052/581-0400. You can check the city’s website at www.ncvb.or.jp.

INTERNET ACCESS The Nagoya International Center (see “Visitor Information,” above) provides Internet access for ¥250 (\$2.10) per 30 minutes. **Café Quatre** (☎ 052/562-1517; open daily 11am–11pm), on the 12th floor of Towers Plaza above Nagoya Station, charges ¥300 (\$2.50) for 30 minutes but you must order something to drink; coffee costs ¥500 (\$4.15).

MONEY/MAIL Nagoya’s Central Post Office (☎ 052/564-2106), located to the left of the Sakura exit of JR Nagoya Station, is open for mail and money exchange Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm. In addition to a counter open 24 hours for mail, it has ATMs open Monday to Saturday 5am to 11:55pm and Sunday and holidays 5am to 8pm.

ORIENTATION Almost completely destroyed during World War II, Nagoya was rebuilt with wide, straight streets, many of which are named.

The ultra-modern, twin-towered **JR Nagoya Station**, with its many train lines (including the Shinkansen), soars more than 50 stories above the skyline and contains Takashimaya department store, offices, a Marriott hotel, many restaurants, and an observatory. Built in 1999, it has been recognized by the Guinness Book of Records as being the world’s largest building containing a railway station. Clustered nearby are the Meitetsu Bus Terminal, Meitetsu Shin-Nagoya Station, the city bus terminal, Kintetsu Station, and a subway station for the Sakura Dori and Higashiyama lines, as well as many hotels and a huge underground shopping arcade that stretches 6km (3¾ miles) and includes about 600 shops.

Tips A Note on Directions

All directions in the listings below are from Nagoya Station unless otherwise noted; the time in parentheses indicates walking time from the subway or bus stop indicated.

Most of the city's attractions spread out east of Nagoya Station (take the Central/Sakuradori exit), including the city's downtown area, **Sakae**, two subway stops from Nagoya Station and with many shops, restaurants, and department stores. Also in Sakae is **Hisaya Odori**, a wide boulevard that stretches north and south with a park and a TV tower in its green meridian. North of Hisaya Odori is **Nagoya Castle**, while south is **Atsuta Jingu Shrine**.

GETTING AROUND The easiest way to get around is via the city's four-line **subway** system, which is simple to use because station names are written in both English and Japanese, and there are English-language announcements and digital signs in trains. Probably the most important line for tourists is the **Meijo Line**, which runs through Sakae underneath Hisaya Odori and takes you to both Nagoya Castle (stop: Shiyakusho) and Atsuta Jingu Shrine (stop: Jingu-Nishi), with one branch terminating at Nagoya Port with its aquarium; if you take this line in the opposite direction, you'll eventually end up at the Ozone stop. Individual tickets for the subway are ¥200 to ¥320 (\$1.65–\$2.65), depending on the distance.

To go where subway lines don't, such as the Tokugawa Art Museum, you'll find it convenient to take one of the **city buses**, for which you'll pay a flat fare of ¥200 (\$1.65). City buses depart from Nagoya Station and the Sakae Bus Terminal. There's also the private **Meitetsu Bus Line** with a terminal located at Nagoya Station; for these buses, take a ticket and pay the exact fare according to the digital panel display at the front when you get off.

There are several **transportation passes** worth considering if you'll be traveling a lot within a single day. For subways, there's a 1-day pass (**Ichinichi Jo-sha**) for ¥740 (\$6.20) that allows you to ride as much as you want for a full day; for ¥850 (\$7.10), you can ride as much as you want on both subways and city buses.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

(108) Arimatsu Narumi Shibori Kaikan During the days of the shogun, Arimatsu was a small village on the old Tokaido Highway. Its inhabitants made a living producing tie-dyed cotton cloth (*shibori*), which they then sold as towels to passing travelers. Today, Arimatsu is a suburb of Nagoya on its southeastern edge, yet it still retains its historic core, with several buildings remaining from the Edo Period and more than 2,500 people still involved in the cottage industry. This small museum pays tribute to the painstaking tie-dyeing process; more than 100 patterns are possible, with a single kimono requiring between 50,000 and 200,000 handmade stitches and taking 4 to 6 months to complete. A 15-minute film tells the history of Arimatsu tie-dyeing and the lengthy process involved in the craft: engraving a pattern, transferring the pattern to the cloth, tying the cloth, dyeing it, and then taking the stitches out. Several women are usually on hand practicing their trade; a small shop sells their wares.

Hashi-higashiminami 60-1, Arimatsu-cho, Midori-ku. ☎ 052/621-0111. www.shibori-kaikan.com. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥100 (85¢) children. Thurs–Tues 9am–4pm. From Shin-Nagoya Station (next to Nagoya

Station), take the Meitetsu train line (the local, not express) 30 min. to Arimatsu Station, walk straight out of the station, turn left at the bottom of the stairs, and then turn left at the sign for HATTORI RESIDENCE; the museum will be on the right (5 min.).

Atsuta Jingu Shrine Because it contains one of the emperor's Three Sacred Treasures, this is revered as one of the three most important shrines in Japan. Founded in the 2nd century and last rebuilt in 1935, it enshrines the Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi (Grass-Mowing Sword), which is one of the Three Regalia of the Emperor. The other two sacred treasures are the Sacred Mirror (in the Ise Grand Shrines; see p. 367) and the Jewels (in the Imperial Palace in Tokyo; see p. 174). According to legend, the Grass-Mowing Sword was presented to a prince named Yamato-Takeru, who used it during a campaign against rebels in eastern Japan; the rebels set a field of grass on fire, and the prince used the sword to mow down the grass, thereby quelling the fire. (*Atsuta* means "hot field" in Japanese.) Actually, there isn't much to see here—the sword is never on public display—yet this remains one of Nagoya's top attractions, and Japanese make pilgrimages here to pay their respects, first purifying their hands or mouths with water, then throwing coins into the money box, clapping twice to gain the attention of the gods, and bowing twice. Surrounded by stately, ancient cypress trees, the shrine provides a nice respite from city life.

1-1-1 Jingu, Atsuta-ku. ☎ 052/671-4151. Free admission to the grounds. Open 24 hr. Station: Jingu-mae (4 min.) via the Meitetsu train line from Shin-Nagoya Station or Jingu-Nishi via subway (5 min.).

Nagoya Castle ★ Built for his ninth son by Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first Tokugawa shogun, Nagoya Castle was completed in 1612 and served as both a strategic stronghold and a residence for members of the Owari branch of the Tokugawa family for almost 250 years, until the Meiji Restoration ended their rule in 1868. A shrewd and calculating shogun, Tokugawa forced feudal lords throughout Japan to contribute to the castle's construction, thereby depleting their resources and making it harder for them to rebel. Although Nagoya Castle was largely destroyed in World War II (only three turrets and three gates escaped destruction), the main donjon and other structures, rebuilt in 1959, are almost carbon copies of the original. Like most reconstructed castles in Japan, this replica is made of ferroconcrete, yet it's still impressive from afar. Inside, the 96m (154-ft.) high donjon is thoroughly modern and even has an elevator up to the fifth floor, where you have fine views of Nagoya and beyond. The castle houses treasures that escaped the bombing during World War II, including beautiful paintings on sliding doors and screens. There's also a model of Honmaru Palace (destroyed during World War II), the living quarters of the shogun when he visited Nagoya, flintlocks, swords, and helmets, as well as displays that explore Nagoya Castle's construction and what life was like during the Edo Period.

Atop the donjon roof are two **golden dolphins**, replicas of those that perished during World War II and long thought to protect the castle from dreaded fires. The dolphins each weigh about 1,193 kilograms (2,650 lb.) and are made of cast bronze covered with 18-karat-gold scales. Incidentally, the dolphin on the south end—the favored, warmer side—is considered male, while the one relegated to the colder northern side is female.

East of the castle is **Ninomaru Garden**, laid out at the time of the castle's construction, converted to a dry Japanese landscape garden in 1716 and today one of the few remaining castle gardens in Japan. Besides providing a beautiful setting, it served as an emergency shelter for the lord in case of enemy attack. Stop by the **Ninomaru Tea House**—it's said that if you drink tea here, 5 years will

be added to your life. That should allow you ample time to linger, but otherwise you can tour the castle and grounds in less than 1½ hours.

1–1 Honmaru, Naka-ku. ☎ **052/231-1700**. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥100 (85¢) junior-high and elementary-school students. Daily 9am–4:30pm. Station: Shiyakusho (5 min.).

Noritake Garden ★★ Nagoya has been a pottery and porcelain production center for centuries; today, the city and its vicinity manufacture 90% of Japan's total export chinaware. The largest chinaware company in Japan is Noritake, founded in 1904 and known the world over for its fine tableware. You can learn more about Noritake by spending about an hour at the site of its former factory, beginning with the Welcome Center's short film depicting the history of Noritake. At the Craft Center, you can see displays explaining the manufacturing and decorating processes involved in making porcelain, as well as watch artisans at work. Unlike most modern-day factories, where work is largely automated, almost all the work done at Noritake is still done by hand. Other highlights include a great museum with examples of all the Noritake chinaware ever produced (including a great Art Deco collection), and a shop selling Noritake (including an outlet corner for discounted products).

3–1–36 Noritake Shinmachi, Nishi-ku. ☎ **052/561-7114**. www.noritake.co.jp. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) high-school students, free for children and seniors. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm (you must enter the Craft Center by 4pm); shop open until 6pm. Subway: Kameijima (5 min.), or a 10-min. walk north of Nagoya Station.

Port of Nagoya Public Aquarium ★★ *Kids* Young Japanese flock to Nagoya's port area on weekends, drawn by a small amusement park, a maritime museum, a shopping complex, and sightseeing boats. But the Public Aquarium, one of Japan's largest, is the major draw for kids of all ages, with displays that concentrate on marine life from the seas around Japan. There's a 15-minute hologram show that transports you to the deep sea in a “submarine”; a touch tank with sea urchins, starfish, and other animals; and an IMAX theater with shows on the hour (included in the entry price). The aquarium is best known, however, for the penguin tank, which copies the environment of the Antarctic with artificial falling snow and cold temperatures to maintain the penguins' reproductive cycle; the loggerhead and green turtles with a sand beach to encourage them to lay eggs; and the half-dozen Beluga whales. There are also dolphin performances and Beluga training sessions (apparently, to keep the Belugas from getting bored). You'll probably spend about 3 hours here, including the IMAX film.

1–3 Minato-machi, Minato-ku. ☎ **052/654-7000**. www.nagoyaaqua.or.jp. Admission ¥2,000 (\$17) adults, ¥1,000 (\$8.35) junior-high and elementary students, ¥500 (\$4.15) children. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5:30pm (to 5pm Dec–Mar, to 8pm July 12–Aug). Station: Nagoyako (exit 3, 7 min.).

Tokugawa Art Museum ★★ ★ *Finds* Located on the grounds of a former mansion owned by the Owari branch of the Tokugawa family—with the original entry gate and a guardhouse still intact—this worthwhile museum houses thousands of documents, samurai armor, swords, matchlocks, helmets, pottery, lacquerware, Noh costumes and masks, and paintings that once belonged to the Tokugawa family, including objects inherited from the first Tokugawa shogun, Ieyasu. There are also replicas of structures and items that once adorned Nagoya Castle, including decorative alcoves, a teahouse, and a Noh stage. The museum's most famous exhibit is the 12th-century picture scrolls of *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji Emaki*), but they're displayed only 1 week a year in autumn (check with

the tourist office); otherwise, replicas are on display. Excellent English explanations throughout the museum put the displays in historical context. You can easily spend an hour here and in the garden (presently being restored, with a slated autumn 2004 opening).

1017 Tokugawa-cho, Higashi-ku. ☎ 052/935-6262. www.cjn.or.jp/tokugawa. Admission ¥1,200 (\$10) adults, ¥700 (\$5.85) university and high-school students, ¥500 (\$4.15) children. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. City bus: From platform no. 7 at Nagoya Station bus terminal, take a bus bound for JIYUGAOKA or IDAKA SHAKO. Or from Sakae, take bus no. 2 to the Shindeki stop (3 min.). Station: JR Ozone (south exit, 10 min.).

Toyota Commemorative Museum of Industry and Technology ★ (Kids)

This museum seems an odd marriage—it's devoted to both textile machinery and automobile production and technology. That's because the Toyota Group, founded by Toyoda Sakichi, the inventor of automatic looms, has a long history of producing both. Housed in an attractive brick building dating from the Taisho Period (1912–25), the museum displays approximately 80 looms and textile machinery, from wooden hand looms to air-jet looms that utilize computer graphics. The automobile pavilion provides a historic chronology of automobile production, beginning with a replica of the first Toyota car (1936), early assembly lines using manpower, and automated assembly lines using industrial robots for everything from engine mounting to painting. There's also a display of both old and new Toyota cars and a film of how Toyota makes its cars. Frequent demonstrations of looms (they're loud!) and auto-making equipment (including robotics) make this a fun destination for adults and kids alike. There's also a hands-on discovery room for kids. Expect to spend 90 minutes here.

4–1–35 Noritake Shinmachi, Nishi-ku. ☎ 052/551-6115. www.tcmiit.org. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) junior-high and high-school students, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm. Train: Meitetsu Line to Sakou (3 min.). Subway: Kamejima (10 min.). Just north of the Noritake Craft Center, about a 15-min. walk from Nagoya Station.

IN NEARBY INUYAMA CITY

Inuyama City has several worthwhile attractions, so I suggest coming here for a day of sightseeing and, in summer, topping it off with some cormorant fishing (see below). The **Inuyama Tourist Office** (☎ 0568/61-6000) is located in Inuyama Station (open daily 9am–5pm), but for information by phone, call the **Inuyama International Tourist Center** (☎ 0568/61-1000). **Note:** There are no specific addresses in this section, since addresses in smaller Japanese cities are of a region rather than an exact street address. However, everyone will know where these attractions are.

Inuyama Castle ★ Constructed in 1537 atop a bluff overlooking the Kiso River, miraculously surviving centuries of war and earthquake (part of it was damaged by an 1891 earthquake but then repaired), Japan's oldest castle is a designated National Treasure. The four-story keep—much smaller than most of Japan's castles—is the nation's only privately owned castle, owned by the Naruse family since 1618. In addition to displaying a few samurai outfits, it offers a nice, expansive view over the river that's especially worth a look if you intend to join the nearby cormorant fishing. The castle is so diminutive you can see everything in 15 minutes.

Admission ¥400 (\$3.35) adults, ¥100 (85¢) children. Daily 9am–5pm. From Meitetsu Shin-Nagoya Station, take the Inuyama Line 23 min. to Inuyama Yuen Station; from there it's about a 15-min. walk.

Museum Meiji Mura ★★ Inuyama City's most important attraction is one of my favorite museums in Japan. In fact, it may well be the main reason for a

P-Ping! Pachinko Parlors

Brightly lit and garish, pachinko parlors are packed with upright **pinball-like machines**—and row upon row of Japanese businessmen, housewives, and students sitting intently in front of them. Originating in Nagoya and popular since the 1950s, pachinko is a game in which ball bearings are flung into this vertical pinball machine one after the other. The player controls the strength with which the ball is released, but otherwise there's very little to do; some players even wedge a matchstick under the control and just watch the machine with folded arms. Points are amassed according to which holes the ball bearings fall into, just like in pinball. If you're good at it, you win ball bearings back, which you can subsequently trade in for food, cigarettes, watches, calculators, and other prizes.

It's illegal to win money in Japan, but outside many pachinko parlors and along back alleyways there are slots where you can trade in the watches, calculators, and other prizes for cash. The slots are so small that the person handing over the goods never sees the person who hands back money. Police, meanwhile, look the other way.

Pachinko parlors compete in an ever-escalating war of themes, lights, and noise. Step inside one and you'll wonder how anyone could possibly think—the noise level of thousands of ball bearings clanking is awesome. Perhaps that's the answer to its popularity: It's an escapist pastime. Some people seem to be addicted to the mesmerizing game; newspaper articles talk of errant husbands who never come home anymore, while psychologists analyze its popularity.

Every hamlet seems to have a pachinko parlor, and cities like Tokyo and Nagoya are inundated with them. You'll see them in nightlife districts and clustered around train stations—but with their unmistakable clanging and clanking, you'll hear them long before you reach their neon-lit facades.

Nagoya stopover. A 100-hectare (250-acre) open-air architectural museum, it features more than 65 buildings and structures dating from the Meiji Period (1868–1912), all beautifully situated on landscaped grounds on the shores of a lake. Before Japan opened its doors in the mid-1800s, unpainted wooden structures dominated Japanese architecture; after Western influences began infiltrating Japan, however, stone, brick, painted wood, towers, turrets, and Victorian features came into play. Unfortunately, earthquakes, war, fire, and developer greed have destroyed most of Japan's Meiji-Era buildings, making this a priceless collection.

On the grounds are Western homes that once belonged to foreigners living in Nagasaki and Kobe, official government buildings and schools, two Christian churches, a post office, a bathhouse, a Kabuki theater, a brewery, bridges, Japanese-style homes, a martial-arts hall, and even a prison. Don't miss the front facade and lobby of the original Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and containing some of the hotel's original Wright-designed furniture. In fact, most of the buildings display furniture and other items related to

the building in which they're housed. You can mail a postcard from the post office, buy candy at the old candy shop, have coffee or tea in the Imperial Hotel lobby sitting on original Wright-designed chairs, or stop for a drink at the brewery. Plan on spending at least 3 hours here. **Tip:** Save money by purchasing a "Bikkuri coupon" at the Meitetsu ticket counter at Shin-Nagoya Station, which includes round-trip bus/train fare and admission to Meiji Mura for ¥2,140 (\$18).

☎ 0568/67-0314. www.meijimura.com. Admission ¥1,600 (\$13) adults, ¥1,000 (\$8.35) high-school students, ¥600 (\$5) children. Daily 9:30am–5pm (to 4pm Nov–Feb). Take the Meitetsu Line from Meitetsu Shin-Nagoya Station to Inuyama Station (¥540/\$4.50 one-way), which takes about 30 min. by express; change there for a 20-min. direct bus to Meiji Mura (¥410/\$3.40 one-way).

WATCHING CORMORANT FISHING ★★

There are two places near Nagoya where you can watch **cormorant fishing** every night in summer (except during a full moon or the 2 or 3 days following a heavy rain). In this ancient, 300-year-old Japanese fishing method, trained *ukai* (seabirds) dive into the water in search of *ayu*, a small Japanese trout. At nightfall, wooden fires are lit in suspended cages at the fronts of long wooden boats to attract the ayu, whereupon leashed cormorants are released into the water. To ensure that the cormorants don't swallow the fish, the birds are fitted with neck rings.

In **Inuyama**, cormorant fishing takes place from June 1 to September 30 on the Kiso River. Spectators can board boats beginning at around 6pm to observe the spectacle firsthand. While waiting for the full darkness that must descend before the fishing takes place (usually around 7:30pm), you can dine on set meals (¥2,000–¥7,000/\$17–\$58) that you order when you make your reservations. You can also purchase drinks from boat vendors and can even buy and set off Japanese fireworks, which give the evening a celebratory atmosphere. The actual fishing itself occupies only 20 minutes. To participate, take the Inuyama Line of the Meitetsu Railways from Meitetsu Shin-Nagoya Station 23 minutes to Inuyama Yuen Station (¥590/\$4.90); from there, it's a 5-minute walk. Call ahead to make reservations (☎ 0568/61-0057); upon arrival, stop by the ticket office near the bridge. Tickets for boarding the boats and watching the fishing (meal prices are listed above) cost ¥2,500 (\$21) for adults and ¥1,250 (\$10) for children in June and September, ¥2,800 (\$23) and ¥1,400 (\$12) respectively in July and August.

The city of **Gifu** features cormorant fishing from May 11 to October 15 on the Nagaragawa River, where you can also dine and view the whole spectacle aboard a small wooden boat. To reach Gifu, take the Meitetsu Main Line train from Meitetsu Shin-Nagoya Station to Shin-Gifu Station (¥540/\$4.50). From there, switch to a local train or bus (¥200/\$1.65) heading for Nagabashi Station. You'll see the ticket office (Gifu-shi Ukai Kanransen Jimusho) after exiting the station. You can call ahead to reserve your ticket (☎ 058/262-0104) beginning in mid-April, daily between 8:45am and 8pm. Tickets cost ¥3,300 (\$28) for adults and ¥2,900 (\$24) for children. Boats depart at 6:15pm, 6:30pm, and 7:05pm.

WHERE TO STAY EXPENSIVE

In addition to the hotels listed below, the **Nagoya Hilton**, 1–3–3 Sakae, Naka-ku, Nagoya 460-0008 (☎ 800/HILTONS or 052/212-1111; fax 052/212-1225; www.hilton.com) offers 438 units to mostly foreign business travelers.

Nagoya Marriott Associa Hotel ★★ A location right over Nagoya Station makes this Nagoya's most convenient hotel. Occupying the 15th to 52nd floors of one of the twin towers that straddles the station, Nagoya's tallest building also offers the city's best views (ask for a room facing the castle and downtown; higher floors cost more), not to mention quick access to the many restaurants and shops on the lower floors of this "vertical city." Despite its central location, it doesn't skimp on facilities, offering a wide range of in-house dining possibilities (to eat at French restaurant Mikuni, considered Nagoya's top restaurant, you must make reservations months in advance) and a health club, as well as good-size, up-to-date guest rooms. Don't miss having a drink at the 52nd-floor Sky Lounge (open daily 11am–midnight)—but all this is assuming you can even find the hotel. Guests arriving by train not only have to search for the obscure ground-floor entryway, but have to battle the crowds taking elevators to the many restaurants. Luckily, it's worth it.

1–14 Meieki, Nakamura-ku, Nagoya 450-6002. ☎ 800/228-9290 in the U.S. and Canada or 052/584-1113. Fax 052/584-1114. www.associa.com/nma. 780 units. ¥17,000–¥29,000 (\$142–\$242) single; ¥24,000–¥36,000 (\$200–\$300) double or twin; from ¥30,000 (\$250) executive-floor double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Nagoya/Shin-Nagoya (below the hotel). **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 2 lounges; bar; 20m (66-ft.) 4-lane pool, Jacuzzi, and fitness gym (fee: ¥3,000/\$25); concierge; business center; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/on-demand pay movies, free high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet, trouser press.

Westin Nagoya Castle ★★ Situated just west of Nagoya Castle, the chief attraction of this 30-some-year-old hotel—a local favorite for special occasions and meetings—is the wonderful views of the moat and castle from its rooms, especially at night when the castle is illuminated. Rooms are spacious enough, but it's worth staying here only if you get a room with a view (note that the cheapest singles do not face the castle); otherwise, the location is rather inconvenient, though courtesy shuttle buses to Nagoya Station once an hour are a big plus.

3–19 Hinokuchi-cho, Nishi-ku, Nagoya 451-8551. ☎ 800/Westin-1 in the U.S. and Canada or 052/521-2121. Fax 052/531-3313. www.castle.co.jp. 229 units. ¥13,000–¥30,000 (\$108–\$250) single; ¥24,000–¥35,000 (\$200–\$292) double or twin; from ¥22,000 (\$183) executive single, from ¥27,000 (\$225) executive double. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Tsurumai Line to Sengencho (10 min.). Bus: Free shuttle from Nagoya Station every hour on the hour 10am–7pm (15-min ride). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; lounge; bar; indoor 5-lane 25m (82-ft.) pool and Jacuzzi (fee: ¥1,500/\$13) with exercise room and sauna (fee: ¥3,000/\$25 for everything); concierge; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Ekimae MontBlanc Hotel Value There isn't a lot to say about this simple hotel except that it's close to the station and offers mostly single functional rooms at reasonable rates. Its corner location frees it from close proximity to taller buildings, which means you can actually look outside rather than face another building (ask for a room on a higher floor). Otherwise, there's not much to crow about; this is strictly a sleeping machine with a fancy name.

3–14-1 Meieki, Nakamura-ku, Nagoya 450-0002. ☎ 052/541-1121. Fax 052/541-1140. 277 units. ¥7,200–¥8,200 (\$60–\$68) single; ¥11,500–¥12,500 (\$96–\$104) twin; ¥11,500 (\$96) double. AE, MC, V. Station: Nagoya (2 min.). Turn left out of the Sakura Dori/Central exit and then right just before the post office. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Italian); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Sofitel The Cypress Nagoya ★★ *Value* Sofitel took over the former Century Hyatt in 2002, and though standards have not yet reached those of its Tokyo property, it has updated its look with contemporary yet comfortable furnishings and offers the same boutique-like atmosphere and friendly service. Its location near Nagoya Station is also a huge plus. Standard rooms are fairly small, and since some face other buildings, ask for a room on a higher floor, where you might have an urban view. Deluxe rooms add space, larger windows, and sink and vanity areas separate from the bathrooms. In short, you won't go wrong staying here, especially at these prices.

2-43-6 Meieki, Nakamura-ku, Nagoya 450-0002. ☎ 052/571-0111. Fax 052/569-1717. www.sofitelthecypress.com. 115 units. ¥14,000–¥18,000 (\$117–\$150) single; ¥19,000–¥24,000 (\$158–\$200) twin or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Nagoya (4 min.). Turn left out of the Sakura Dori/Central exit and then right just before the post office. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Continental, coffee shop); bar; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Tokyo Dai-Ichi Hotel Nishiki ★★ *Finds* This smart-looking hotel is my top pick among Nagoya's moderately priced hotels in the city center. Located in the heart of Nagoya's nightlife and business district on Nishiki Dori, it opened in 1997 with prices comparable to those of a business hotel but with a much classier atmosphere and decor. Targeting female travelers as well as businesspeople, it offers smartly decorated rooms with large desks and larger-than-usual bath towels; all but the cheapest singles, which are located next to elevator shafts, have dataports as well. Some of the standard twins have two sinks (good for two people trying to get ready at the same time), while deluxe twins are separated into living and sleeping areas and even have two TVs and broadband access. Rooms facing another building have glazed windows, so if seeing out is important to you, be sure to say so.

3-18-21 Nishiki, Naka-ku, Nagoya 460-0003. ☎ 052/955-1001. Fax 052/953-6783. www.daiichi-hotel.co.jp. 233 units. ¥8,000–¥10,000 (\$67–\$83) single; ¥13,000 (\$108) double; ¥15,000–¥22,000 (\$125–\$183) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Sakae (exit 1, 3 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Chinese, coffee shop, Japanese seafood); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet, trouser press.

INEXPENSIVE

Meiryu Ryokan A Japanese Inn Group member and family-owned for more than 50 years, this is a no-nonsense place. Most customers are Japanese businessmen, some of whom have lived here during the week for years, commuting home to families on weekends. Tatami rooms are spotless and cozy, with more space and features than most other hotel rooms in this price category, including a closet and free coffee. The men's public bathroom has a sauna (they don't have many female guests at this ryokan—fewer than 5%—but there's a separate bathroom in case a lone female makes an appearance). The owners' son, who often clerks the front desk, speaks English well and is very helpful. In short, this place is okay for males and couples, but single females may feel uncomfortable.

2-4-21 Kamimaezu, Naka-ku, Nagoya 463-0013. ☎ 052/331-8686. Fax 052/321-6119. www.japan-net.ne.jp/~meiryu. 23 units (none with bathroom). ¥5,000 (\$42) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) twin; ¥10,500 (\$88) triple. Japanese breakfast ¥600 (\$5) extra; Japanese dinner ¥2,200 (\$18) extra. AE, V. Station: Kamimaezu (exit 3, 4 min.). Walk straight out of the station 1 block and turn left; it's on the 2nd block, on the left. **Amenities:** Coin-operated laundry. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Petit Ryokan Ichifuji ★ *Kids* Although this place is way out there in Ozone (pronounced *Ozon-ay* in Japanese), the couple running this Japanese Inn Group ryokan has put so much heart and soul into the accommodations that it's well

worth the subway ride. Ishida Tomiyasu, who speaks a little English, inherited the 45-year-old ryokan from his father and grandfather, and together with his wife, Yoko, has remodeled it to fit younger Japanese taste and has put in a cypress public bath (open 24 hr.). While the house's bright pink exterior and its collection of bears and rabbits may be too cutesy for some, the youthful staff and the owners' two children make this a welcoming, family-oriented retreat. Best of all, children under 7 years of age stay for free, while those under 13 are half price. Even dogs and cats are welcome here (the owners have two dogs of their own). All except one of the rooms is tatami, and both Japanese and Western breakfasts and dinners are available. You'll feel right at home.

1-7 Saikobashi-dori, Kita-ku, Nagoya 462-0818. ☎ 052/914-2867. Fax 052/981-6836. www.jin.ne.jp/ichifuji. 10 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,800–¥5,300 (\$40–\$44) single; ¥8,400–¥9,400 (\$70–\$78) double; ¥10,800–¥12,300 (\$90–\$103) triple. Breakfast ¥500 (\$4.15) extra; dinner ¥1,500 (\$13) extra. AE, MC, V. Station: Heiandori (exit 2, 3 min.); Ozone (8 min). **Amenities:** Coin-operated washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

One of Nagoya's specialties is *kishimen*, fettuccine-like broad and flat white noodles usually served in a soup stock with soy sauce, tofu, dried bonito shavings, and chopped green onions. Nagoya is also famous for *miso nikomi udon*—udon noodles served in a bean-paste soup and flavored with such ingredients as chicken and green onions. *Cochin* (free-range) chicken and breaded pork cutlets (*tonkatsu*) are also Nagoya favorites.

AROUND NAGOYA STATION

The best place for one-stop dining is Nagoya Station itself, on the 12th and 13th floors of one of the twin towers atop the station. Called **Towers Plaza**, it offers more than 30 food-and-beverage outlets (in addition to Kappa; see below) serving noodles, sushi, tempura, Chinese food, Italian fare, and more, most with glass-window displays.

If you reserve early enough (at least 2 months in advance), you might also get one of the coveted tables at French restaurant **Mikuni** on the 52nd floor of the Nagoya Marriott Associa Hotel (☎ 052/584-1111). Decorated in Art Nouveau style and considered by some to be the city's finest restaurant, it offers set lunches for ¥5,000 to ¥8,000 (\$42–\$67) from 11:30am to 2:30pm and set dinners for ¥12,000 to ¥15,000 (\$100–\$125) from 5:30 to 9pm, with a menu that changes daily.

Kappa ★ *Finds* SUSHI/VARIED JAPANESE This friendly establishment, easily found because of its castlelike exterior, is actually two restaurants, one serving varied Japanese cuisine, and the other, to the right, serving sushi. Since the sushi is delivered via a conveyor belt, choosing is no more difficult than reaching out for a passing plate, which is color-coded according to price. Set sushi meals are also available. The dining room to the left, decorated with bamboo-slatted screens for added privacy and Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired grillwork and stained glass, offers both a menu with photographs and a display case for meals that include tempura, noodles, fish, tonkatsu, and other fare. Seating here is at tables and chairs or on the floor at low tables with leg wells, some with nice city views. Both restaurants offer weekday set lunches for ¥900 (\$7.50) until 3pm. To find Kappa in the “city” that Nagoya Station has become, take the elevators next to the Takashimaya cloakroom.

12th floor, Towers Plaza, Nagoya Station, 1-1-4 Meieki, Nakamura-ku. ☎ 052/541-7888. 2 pieces sushi ¥120–¥480 (\$1–\$4); set meal ¥980–¥2,000 (\$8.15–\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10:30pm (last order).

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide with an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in appendix C showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, **Yamamoto-ya Honten** (below), refer to no. 109 in appendix C.

109 Yamamoto-ya Honten UDON NOODLES This chain noodle shop, a 2-minute walk from Nagoya Station, specializes in miso nikomi udon. Its noodles, all handmade, are thick, hard, and chewy and are served in a type of bean paste that's special to Nagoya. If you like your noodles spicy, add spices to your food from the large bamboo container on your table. An English-language menu with explanations makes ordering easy.

25-9 Meieki, basement of the Horiuchi Building, Sakura Dori, Nakamura-ku. ☎ 052/565-0278. Udon dishes ¥1,200–¥1,950 (\$10–\$16); set meal ¥1,900 (\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Station: Nagoya (exit 6, 2 min.); on Sakura Dori's north side.

IN SAKAE

If you are collecting T-shirts or are hungry for a hamburger, there's a **Hard Rock Cafe** on the third floor of the ZXY Building on Hirokoji Street not far from the Hilton, at 1-4-5 Sakae, Naka-ku (☎ 052/218-3220; open daily 11:30am–11pm, to 3am Fri and Sat).

Hourai-ken Matsuzakaya-ken EEL This eel restaurant is a branch of two famous restaurants near Atsuta Shrine. There's no English-language menu, but you can't go wrong ordering one of the various *unagi donburi* (rice casserole with eel on top). Most famous is the Hitsumabushi, a set meal for ¥2,300 (\$19) that includes unagi donburi, various condiments, miso soup, and Japanese pickles. Eating it is a ritual: First, dish out some of the eel casserole into the smaller wooden bowl and eat it plain. For the next course, try it with some of the seaweed and green onions that come with it. Finally, add some of the soup and wasabi to the last mixture you tried.

The other, more elegant branches are both south of Atsuta Shrine at 2-10-26 Jingu, Atsuta-ku (☎ 052/682-5598; open Wed–Mon 11:30am–2:30pm and 4:30–8:30pm); and at 503 Gondo-cho, Atsuta-ku (☎ 052/671-8686; open Tues–Sun 11:30am–2pm and 4:30–8:30pm).

In the south building of Matsuzakaya department store, in the back on the 10th floor (look for the sign that says UNAGI HORAIKEN), 3-16-1 Sakae, Naka-ku. ☎ 052/264-3825. *Unagi teishoku* (set meal) ¥1,500–¥2,300 (\$13–\$19). AE, V. Daily 11am–9pm (last order). Station: Yabacho (1 min.).

Tiger Cafe FRENCH With its antique-looking advertisements for Pernod, tiled floor, small tables, and rattan chairs facing the open facade, this coffee shop is the closest thing in Nagoya to a Parisian cafe. Stop for a drink, a snack of quiche, *escargots et champignon*, or an omelet, or dine on more substantial fare like the fish of the day, pan-fried duck, or steak, and be glad you're not part of the traffic whizzing by.

1-9-22 Higashi-sakura, Higashi-ku. ☎ 052/971-1031. Main dishes ¥1,500–¥2,000 (\$13–\$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–3am; Sat 10am–3am; Sun 10am–midnight. Station: Sakae (6 min.); across from the NHK building (which you won't be able to miss).

⑪⑩ **Torigin Honten** ★ COCHIN CHICKEN In the heart of Nagoya, next to Sabatini (below), this 30-year-old casual restaurant with counter, tatami, or table seating is known for its *Nagoya cochin* (free-range chicken). It also serves yakitori, with a set menu of eight different skewers costing ¥1,680 (\$14), as well as *miso-nabe* (rice cake, tofu, chicken, and vegetable stew) and *kamameshi* set meals (rice casseroles). An amiable staff makes it diner-friendly; a black-and-white kura-style facade makes it easy to identify.

3-14-22 Nishiki, Naka-ku. ☎ 052/973-3000. Set meals ¥950–¥4,900 (\$7.90–\$41). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm (last order). Closed irregularly. Station: Sakae (4 min.).

Trattoria Italiano Sabatini ★★ ITALIAN Boasting an airy atrium with large mural “windows” opening onto an Italian town, this branch of the famous Tokyo restaurants run by brothers from Rome is a welcome addition to the Nagoya dining scene. With staff and chef trained in the Tokyo store, it serves the same excellent, very Italian cuisine with many ingredients imported from Italy. Lunches change daily and dinners weekly, with a wide variety of antipasta and pasta always available. *Pollo alla cacciatore* (chicken in a tomato and olive sauce) and *filetto al carpaccio* (thin slices of beef) are on the a la carte menu. My lunch menu consisted of antipasta; linguine with spicy tomato and mushroom sauce; grilled garlic, potatoes, spinach, and broccoli; two kinds of homemade gelato; pie; and coffee, after which I was ready to climb through that “window” in search of my siesta.

3-14-22 Nishiki, Naka-ku. ☎ 052/973-4560. Main dishes ¥2,000–¥4,200 (\$17–\$35); pasta ¥1,200–¥1,900 (\$10–\$16); set lunch ¥2,000–¥3,900 (\$17–\$33); set dinner ¥6,000 and ¥8,000 (\$50 and \$67). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–10pm (last order). Station: Sakae (4 min.).

⑪① **Yabaton** ★★ Finds TONKATSU You’ll recognize this Everyman’s eatery in Nagoya’s old downtown district immediately by its curtains displaying comical pigs dressed like sumo wrestlers. It’s light years from being fancy, with a very local, lively atmosphere. The only thing served is *tonkatsu* (pork cutlet), and Yabaton is famous for it. You’ll be asked whether you want yours with *sa-u-zu* (sauce) or *miso katsudon*; the former is thicker and sweeter, but the latter is the specialty here (if you can’t decide, ask for a little of both). *Donburi*, a breaded and fried pork cutlet on rice, is the cheapest, but recommended is *hire*, a tender cut with less fat. Main dishes all come with cabbage; rice is ¥200 (\$1.65) extra, while miso soup is ¥100 (85¢) extra.

3-6-23 Osu. ☎ 052/241-2409. Main dishes ¥700–¥1,300 (\$5.85–\$11); set meal ¥1,000–¥1,900 (\$8.35–\$16). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–9pm. Station: Yabacho (3 min.). From Wakamiya-Otsu Dori intersection, walk 1 short block south on Otsu Dori and turn right.

2 Ise-Shima National Park ★★

465km (289 miles) W of Tokyo; 100km (62 miles) S of Nagoya

Blessed with subtropical vegetation, small islands dotting its shoreline, and the most revered Shinto shrine in Japan, **Ise-Shima National Park** merits a 1- or 2-night stopover if you’re anywhere near Nagoya. Located on and around Shima Peninsula and covering 518 sq. km (200 sq. miles), this national park has bays and inlets that make up the home of the Mikimoto pearl and thousands of pearl-cultivating rafts. Although you could conceivably cover the major attractions on a day’s outing from Nagoya, I’ve recommended accommodations in case you’d like to take in the sights at a more leisurely pace.

Ise-Shima's major attractions are concentrated in the small towns of Ise, Futami-no-ura, Toba, and Kashikojima, all in Mie Prefecture. **Ise** (also called Ise-Shi, which translates as Ise City) is where you'll find the Ise Grand Shrines. **Futami-no-ura** (also called simply Futami) is famous for a theme park based on Japan's history from 1477 to 1598. **Toba** contains Mikimoto Pearl Island, which offers a pearl museum and demonstrations by its famous women divers, as well as the Toba Aquarium. Near **Kashikojima**, you can visit an amusement park with a Spanish theme or take boat trips around Ago Bay which, with its islets and pearl-cultivating oyster rafts, is one of the most scenic spots in the park.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Train The easiest way to get to Ise-Shima is from Nagoya on the private **Kintetsu Nagoya Line** (Kinki Nippon Railway), which departs about every 30 minutes or so from Kintetsu Station, next to the JR Nagoya Station. It takes about 1 hour and 20 minutes via limited express to reach Ise (with stops at both Ise-Shi and Ujiyamada stations), about 1 hour and 35 minutes to reach Toba, and 2 hours to reach Kashikojima. **Note:** Kintetsu trains do not go to Futami-no-ura. A ticket from Nagoya to the end of the line in Kashikojima costs ¥3,480 (\$29) one-way. There are also Kintetsu lines to Shima Peninsula both from Kyoto (2 hr. and 15 min. to Toba; fare: ¥3,780/\$32) and from Osaka's Kintetsu stations in Uehonmachi and Tsuruhashi (2 hr. to Toba; fare: ¥3,550/\$30 and ¥3,450/\$29 respectively).

If you're traveling on a **Japan Rail Pass**, you can also reach Ise-Shima by **JR Kaisoku (Rapid) Mie** trains, which depart hourly from Nagoya Station, but you'll be charged an extra ¥490 (\$4.10). JR trains stop at Ise-Shi and Futami-no-ura before terminating at Toba where, if you're heading to Kashikojima, you'll have to transfer to the Kintetsu Line.

By Bus Buses depart nightly from Tokyo's Ikebukuro Station's east exit at 10:20 and 11:20pm, arriving at Ise-Shi Station at 6:25 and 7:25am respectively. The fare is ¥7,850 (\$65) one-way.

VISITOR INFORMATION Be sure to drop by the Tourist Information Centers in Tokyo, Kyoto, or the international airports at Narita or Osaka to pick up the free leaflet, "Ise-Shima," which lists train schedules from Osaka, Kyoto, and Nagoya and gives information on the park's main attractions. Otherwise, drop by the **Ise-Shi City Tourist Information Center** located at Kintetsu Ujiyamada Station in Ise City (☎ 0596/23-9655), or the **Toba Tourist Office** at Toba Station (☎ 0599/25-2844), both open daily 9am to 5:30pm.

GETTING AROUND Transportation within Ise-Shima National Park is either by train or by bus. **Trains** are convenient if your destinations are Ise City, Toba, Futami-no-ura, and Kashikojima (see "Getting There," above). Some major sites, however, including the Outer and Inner Shrines and Edo Wonderland Ise, are best reached by bus. For sightseers, there's the **CAN-Bus**, which you can board in front of the JR stations in Ise City and Toba. Buses, departing hourly on weekdays and twice an hour on weekends, travel from Ujiyamada and Ise-Shi stations to both Outer and Inner Shrines of the Ise Grand Shrines and Edo wonderland Ise before continuing onward to Toba. One-day passes for ¥1,000 (\$8.35) and 2-day passes for ¥1,600 (\$13) can be bought aboard the buses. There are also local city buses that run between the Outer and Inner Shrine of the Ise Grand Shrines; you must take a bus to reach Parque España.

EXPLORING ISE-SHIMA NATIONAL PARK

The easiest way to see the park's sights is to start in Ise City, the northern gateway to Ise-Shima National Park, and work your way down the peninsula to Kashikojima.

ISE CITY (ISE-SHI)

THE ISE GRAND SHRINES  Tied historically to the imperial family and considered the most venerable Shinto shrines in the nation, the Ise Grand Shrines (Ise Jingu) consist of the Outer Shrine and the Inner Shrine, plus more than 100 minor shrines spread through a dense forest of Japanese cypress. Since the Outer and Inner shrines are about 6.4km (4 miles) apart, your best bet is to first visit the Outer Shrine, which is a 5-minute walk from Ise-Shi Station, and then take a bus to the Inner Shrine. In addition to the CAN-Bus (described above in "Getting Around"), local bus nos. 51 and 55 run between the two shrines every 10 to 15 minutes and cost ¥410 (\$3.40) one-way. Because of the distance between the shrines and their large grounds, plan on spending at least 2 hours exploring Ise. If you have luggage but the biggest lockers are already taken, you can leave your bags at the left-luggage counter (look for the sign that says CLOAK ROOM) at Ise-Shi Station, open daily. Ise-Shi and Ujiyamada stations are a 7-minute walk apart.

The **Outer Shrine (Geku)** was founded in 477 and is dedicated to the Shinto goddess of harvest, agriculture, clothing, and housing. The **Inner Shrine (Naiku)** was founded a few centuries earlier and is dedicated to Amaterasu, the sun goddess. Both are among the few Shinto shrines in Japan without any Chinese Buddhist influences. Constructed of plain cypress wood with thick thatched roofs in the oldest style of architecture in Japan, they're starkly simple and have no ornamentation except for gold and copper facing on their beams and doors. In fact, if you've come all the way to Shima Peninsula just to see the shrines, you may be disappointed—there's nothing much to see. The shrines are so sacred that no one is allowed near them except members of the imperial family and high-ranking Shinto priests. Both shrines are surrounded by four wooden fences, and lesser mortals are allowed only as far as the third gate.

The fences don't allow you to see much, but that doesn't stop the estimated six million Japanese who come here annually. They come because of what the shrines represent, which is an embodiment of Japanese Shinto itself. The Inner Shrine is by far the more important because it's dedicated to the sun goddess, considered to be the legendary ancestress of the imperial family. It contains the Sacred Mirror (Yata-no-Kagami), one of the Three Sacred Treasures of the emperor.

According to legend, the sun goddess sent her grandson to Japan so that he and his descendants could rule over the country. Before he left, she gave him three insignia—a mirror, a sword, and a set of jewels. As she handed him the mirror, she is said to have remarked, "When you look upon this mirror, let it be as if you look upon me." The mirror, therefore, is said to embody the sun goddess herself and is regarded as the most sacred object in the Shinto religion. It's kept in the deep recesses of the Inner Shrine in a special casket and is never shown to the public. (The sword is in the Atsuta Shrine in Nagoya, and the jewels are in the Imperial Palace in Tokyo.)

Perhaps the most amazing thing about the Outer and Inner shrines is that, even though they were founded centuries ago, the buildings themselves have

never been more than 20 years old—every 20 years they're completely torn down and rebuilt exactly as they were on neighboring sites. The present buildings were built in 1993 for the 61st time. No photos of the shrines are allowed.

Even though you can't see much of the shrines, they're still the most important stops in Ise-Shima. The Inner Shrine is approached by crossing the elegant Uji Bridge of the Isuzu River, passing through a manicured garden, and then entering a dark forest of 800-year-old cypress trees. Watch how the Japanese stop after crossing the second small bridge on the approach to the shrine to wash and purify their hands and mouths with water from the Isuzu River. Its source lies on the Inner Shrine, and it's considered sacred. You may also see a couple of royal horses, one white and one brown, kept in stables near the shrine for the use of the sun goddess.

ISE'S HISTORIC DISTRICTS ★★ After visiting the Inner Shrine (a 45-min. walk round-trip), turn right after recrossing Uji Bridge for the nearby historic district of **Oharai-machi**, whose main street is lined with beautiful wooden buildings and *kura* (storehouses), some dating from the Edo Period and others newly constructed but faithful to traditional architecture. It once served as the main pilgrimage road leading to the Grand Shrines of Ise. During the Edo Period, when travel was strictly controlled, joining a mass pilgrimage to Ise was for many Japanese a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to venture beyond their homes; here, they took full advantage of it here. Today it's an interesting area for a stroll, shopping, or a meal.

About halfway down is **Okage-yokocho**, a re-created Meiji Era village with teahouses, restaurants, and shops selling Japanese candies, traditional toys, folk crafts, and candles. If you have time, stop by the (112) **Okageza** ★ (☎ 0596/23-8838; open daily 10am–5pm), a museum housed in an authentic Edo-Era building that captures the spirit of Oharai-machi during the Edo Period; dioramas of half-scale models and street scenes vividly convey what life was like for both the residents and the pilgrims passing through. It's the next best thing to a time machine. Admission is ¥600 (\$5) for adults and ¥300 (\$2.50) for children; English earphones are included in the price. You'll spend about 15 minutes here.

Across from Okage-yokocho is (113) **Akafuku** (☎ 0596/22-2154; open daily 5am–5pm), the original makers (opened in 1707) of the sticky rice cakes for which Ise-Shima is famous. You'll recognize the shop by the *kamado* (huge, red, ginger jar-shaped ceramic cooking stoves) used to heat water for tea in the open entranceway. It has been a tradition to serve complimentary tea to shrine-goers for centuries, and this shop, built in 1887, still does. You pay only for the cakes—¥230 (\$1.90) for three cakes with tea. First pay at the old cash register on the dark-wood counter; the staff, in traditional dark-blue outfits, will then serve you on tatami mats around braziers or on benches in the back overlooking the river. You can watch cakes being made and, May through August, you can also watch swallows fly in and out to their nests in the eaves.

Off the beaten tourist track is **Kawasaki**, which served as Ise City's business district during the Edo Period, when boats traversing the Setagawa River delivered goods to storehouses along the river's banks. A grass-roots movement has restored four of these storehouses along with an Edo-Era house, grouped together in the (114) **Ise-Kawasaki Shonin-Kan**, 2–25–32 Kawasaki (☎ 0596/22-4810; open Wed–Mon 9:30am–5pm), which you can tour for ¥300 (\$2.50). Surrounding buildings have been turned into restaurants and shops selling crafts, food, antiques, and pottery. In a country where old neighborhoods are

disappearing by the minute, the local people who have fought to preserve this historic district deserve medals. It's a 10-minute walk from Ujiyamada Station.

FUTAMI-NO-URA

If you're at all sentimental, make a trip to Futami-no-ura (also called simply Futami), which you can reach by JR train in 10 minutes from either Ise-Shi or Toba or by bus in 25 minutes from the Inner Shrine in Ise. There you'll find a pair of large rocks that jut out of the sea not far from shore. Known as the **Wedded Rocks**, they represent man and wife and are joined by a thick braided rope, the same kind you see extended from torii gates at Shinto shrines. The best time to visit is at dawn in summer: In this Land of the Rising Sun, the spectacle of the sun rising between these two rocks is a favorite among Japanese, especially during the solstice when the rising sun goes one better by also revealing the silhouette of Mount Fuji. But you have to be an early bird to catch it—the sun rises as early as 4:30am in summer.

Edo Wonderland Ise (Ise Azuchi Momoyama Bunka-Mura) ★★☆☆ (Kids)

The castle you see on the hill from Futami-no-ura Station (which, by the way, is a mirrored building shaped like the Wedded Rocks) is not the former residence of a famous shogun but a replica of Azuchi Castle in Edo Wonderland, one of Japan's many theme parks. If you have youngsters in tow or if you haven't seen one of these period theme parks elsewhere in Japan, go to one—they're fun! This one is among my favorites because, rather than try to re-create a village in Holland or Spain, it's centered on a specific time in Japan's history, the Age of the Warring States—the Sengoku Era (1477–1573), when local warlords struggled for supremacy, and the Azuchi-Momoyama Era (1573–98), when Oda Nobunaga gained control of the land and finally put an end to civil war. In keeping with the theme of this Japanese equivalent of Dodge City, all the staff are dressed in 16th-century costumes, and attractions reflect the pre-Edo Era; visually, it looks just like a movie set. You can watch period dramas and theater ranging from a courtesan performance that includes singing and dancing to the action-charged antics of a Ninja troupe. A 3-D movie captures the destruction of Toyotomi Hideyoshi's Osaka Castle by Tokugawa forces, while in the Ninja Labyrinth you can try to negotiate 11 challenging obstacles. There are no thrill rides here, but there are old-fashioned game centers, including shooting ranges using bows and arrows and other weaponry of the era. That gold-roofed castle is dedicated to Nobunaga—who built Azuchi Castle—and is filled with high-tech giant screens, dioramas, and lasers that depict famous attacks he staged to gain control; plenty of visual and audio effects will make you feel you're in the midst of war. The top-floor Gold Room, lined with real gold, has a great view of Ise-Shima. You'll probably spend 2 to 3 hours here.

📍 0596/43-2300. Admission ¥4,900 (\$41) adults, ¥2,500 (\$21) children 4–12. Daily 9am–5pm (9:30am–4pm Dec–Mar). A 15-min. walk from Futami-no-ura Station or a couple minutes' walk from the CAN-Bus Ise Sengoku Jidaimura/Edo Wonderland bus stop.

TOBA

Mikimoto Pearl Island ★★☆☆ Toba's best-known attraction is touristy but still quite enjoyable, especially if you have a weakness for pearls or have ever wondered how they're cultivated.

To learn about the man who toiled through years of adversity to produce the world's first cultured pearl, visit **Kokichi Mikimoto Memorial Hall**, built in 1993 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Mikimoto's success. Born in

Toba in 1858, as the eldest son of a noodle-shop owner, Kokichi Mikimoto went to Yokohama as a young man and was surprised to see stalls selling pearls with great success. He reasoned that if oysters produced pearls as the result of an irritant inside the shell, why couldn't humans introduce the irritant themselves and induce oysters to make pearls? It turned out to be harder than it sounded. It wasn't until 5 years after he started his research that Mikimoto finally succeeded in cultivating his first pearl, here on what is today called Mikimoto Pearl Island. In 1905, Mikimoto cultivated his first perfectly round pearl, after which he built what is probably the most successful pearl empire in the world.

Mikimoto, who died at the age of 93, was a remarkable man and a real character. In addition to chronicling his life, the Memorial Hall contains some of his earliest jewelry and models made with pearls, many of which were only recently re-acquired by Mikimoto & Co. Ltd. through auctions. My favorite is the brooch made for the 1937 Paris International Exhibition, which can be worn a dozen different ways by employing various clasps. The Pearl Pagoda has 12,760 Mikimoto pearls and took 750 artisans 6 months to complete, after which it was exhibited at the Philadelphia World Exhibition in 1926. The Liberty Bell, a third the size of the original, has 12,250 pearls and was displayed at the New York World's Fair in 1939.

The **Pearl Museum** tells all you'd probably ever want to know about the creation of pearls, with live demonstrations that show the insertion of the round nucleus into the shell, a video of the harvesting of the pearls 2 years later, and more live demonstrations that explain the process of making a pearl necklace by hand, from the selection and sorting of pearls to the drilling and stringing. You can learn about the criteria used for pricing pearls (luster is the most important) and can see an exhibit that examines the relationship between people and pearls since ancient times. There are also more Mikimoto pearl creations like the Pearl Pavilion, which contains a pearl 1.6 inches in diameter and resembles Nara's Hall of Dreams.

In addition, **women divers** (*ama*) in traditional white outfits demonstrate how women of the Shima Peninsula have dived through the ages in search of abalone, seaweed, and other edibles. They were also essential to the pearl industry, diving to collect the oysters and then returning them to the seabed following insertion of the nuclei. At one time, there were thousands of *ama*, known for their skill in diving to great depths for extended periods of time. It is said that there are still more than 1,000 of these women divers left, but I've seen them only at demonstrations given for tourists. If you happen to see *ama* working in earnest (diving for abalone and other food, not pearls), consider yourself lucky. Here you can watch them from the air-conditioned comfort of a viewing room built especially for overseas guests.

There's also, of course, a shop selling Mikimoto pearl jewelry and a restaurant. You can easily spend 1½ hours on Pearl Island.

1–7–1 Toba, ☎ 0599/25-2028. Admission ¥1,500 (\$13) adults, ¥750 (\$6.25) children 7–15. Mid-Mar to May, mid-July to Aug, and Oct to mid-Nov, daily 8:30am–5:30pm; Jan to mid-Mar, June to mid-July, Sept, and mid-Nov to end of Nov, daily 8:30am–5pm; Dec, daily 9am–4:30pm. Station: Toba (a few minutes' walk), connected to the mainland via a short pedestrian bridge.

Toba Aquarium ★ *Kids* Next to Pearl Island is one of Japan's largest aquariums, containing more than 850 species of aquatic plants and animals. Various zones and themes make it easy to navigate. The display of marine animals around Ise-Shima and Japan includes giant spider crabs and the finless porpoise,

the world's smallest whale. The exhibit of "living fossils"—creatures that have remained relatively unchanged since ancient times—includes sharks, horseshoe crabs, and the nautilus (which are bred here; babies are often on display), while the marine mammal kingdom includes Commerson's dolphins, seals, and sea lions, with sea-lion shows several times a day. The aquarium also boasts exotic and rare creatures such as dugongs, African manatees, and Amazonian turtles and frogs. My only complaint is that some of the tanks look rather bare and out-dated in today's world of ever-more-sophisticated aquariums; maybe the animals don't mind, but spectators sure do. Plan on spending at least 90 minutes here, longer if you have kids.

3–3–6 Toba, ☎ 0599/25-2555. Admission ¥2,400 (\$20) adults, ¥1,200 (\$10) children. Nov to mid-Mar daily 9am–4:30pm; mid-Mar to mid-July and Sept–Oct daily 8:30am–5pm; mid-July to Aug daily 8:30am–6pm. Station: Toba (a few minutes' walk).

KASHIKOJIMA

At the southern end of the Shima Peninsula, the last stop on the Kintetsu Line is Kashikojima.

One of the main attractions of Kashikojima for the Japanese is the **boat cruises of Ago Bay**. Vessels, built to resemble Spanish galleons or with other Spanish-based themes, depart from the town's boat dock, about a 2-minute walk from the tiny train station. The cost of the cruise is ¥1,500 (\$13) for adults, half price for children. You'll pass pearl-cultivating rafts, fishing boats, and many small islands along the way. The trip lasts almost an hour, with boats departing every half-hour or so between 9:30am and 4:30pm March 21 through October, less frequently in winter. For more information or inquiries about the winter schedule, call the **Shima Marine Leisure Co.** (☎ 0599/43-1023).

Parque España ★★ Kids You may wonder what this Spanish village, called Shima Spain Mura by the locals, is doing in southern Ise Shima. Mie Prefecture has a sister relationship with Valencia in Spain, a relationship that is exploited to the hilt in this ambitious theme park. A huge facility that employs about 40 Spanish-speaking natives, the Spanish-themed amusement park includes a shopping area specializing in products from Spain; a plaza that stages dances, festivals, and other outdoor entertainment; a coliseum that features folk dancing and singing; a live theater production called *Lost Legend* that features a fire-and-flood extravaganza (summers only); and amusement rides that range from an adventure lagoon ride through a world of fantasy to the fastest roller coaster I'll ever care to ride (and one of the longest, lasting more than 3 hair-raising min.). Although the park opened to much fanfare in 1994, it has suffered declining attendance ever since, which is bad for business but means there's virtually no waiting time for rides, except during school holidays.

Most educational is the Museo Castillo de Xavier, a reproduction of the castle where Francis Xavier was born (Xavier later brought Christianity to Japan); it presents a brief overlook of highlights in Spanish history, though in Japanese. Still, there's no mistaking the replica of prehistoric drawings from the Altamira caves, the model of the *Santa Maria* that Columbus sailed to America, and replicas of the Prado's most famous works. There are amusements geared to all ages, as well as numerous restaurants. Plan on spending about 3 hours here.

☎ 0599/57-3333. Passport admission to all attractions ¥4,800 (\$40) adults, ¥3,800 (\$32) seniors and children 12–17, ¥3,200 (\$27) children 4–11; extra charges for gaming houses and flamenco show. Admission only, which includes the museum and most shows but no rides (which you can purchase separately for ¥200–¥600/\$1.65–\$5 per ride) ¥2,800 (\$23) adult, ¥1,800 (\$15) children 12–17, ¥1,200 (\$10) children 4–11.

Daily 9am–9pm July 19–Aug; rest of the year, Mon–Fri 9:30am–5pm, Sat–Sun and holidays 9:30am–6pm. Closed last 2 weeks of Feb. Station: Isobe (Kintetsu Line), then a bus that runs 3 times per hour and costs ¥360 (\$3) for the 15-min. ride. There are also 3 buses a day from Kashikojima.

WHERE TO STAY

Kashikojima is the best place to go if you want to escape the crowds and relax in a rural setting, while Toba and Ise have the greatest number of attractions.

ISE

⑪⑤ **Asakichi** ★ Since a pilgrimage to the Ise Grand Shrines was often the only trip in his lifetime a commoner may have made during the Edo Period, he often lived it up to the hilt in Furuichi, Ise's former red-light district. Located between the Inner and Outer shrines, it was filled with many ryokan, brothels, and restaurants. Now only Asakichi remains, founded more than 200 years ago by the present owner's family, on an impossibly narrow street. The ryokan takes its name from the family name Asa, which means "hemp" and which was probably supplied to commoners seeking offerings for the shrines. In any case, the ryokan seems little changed since then, built on a slope and even containing a museum of sorts filled with dusty, Edo-Era memorabilia which you can request to see. The tatami rooms are simple. Meals are served in the privacy of your room, except during peak times when they're served in a dining room. Western breakfasts are available. The proprietress doesn't speak much English but understands the basics.

109 Nakanochō, Ise-Shi, Mie 516-0034. ☎ 0596/22-4101. Fax 0596/22-4102. 15 units (3 with bathroom). ¥10,000 (\$83) per person. Rates include 2 meals. No credit cards. Station: Ise-Shi, then bus no. 1 or 2 from platform 7 another 9 min. to the Nakanochō stop (1 min.). **Amenities:** Museum. *In room:* A/C, TV.

⑪⑥ **Hoshidekan** ★★ *Finds* Catering to the health conscious, this inexpensive 80-year-old wooden Japanese Inn Group ryokan has several tatami rooms with windows framed with gnarled roots and bamboo (they simply don't make windows like this anymore) encircling an inner courtyard. It's nothing fancy, but it's run by a friendly, grandmotherly woman who is a strong advocate of macrobiotic vegetarian meals, which are served in your simple tatami room. (Both Japanese and Western meals are available, but we prefer the ¥1,000/\$9 *Genmai teishoku* vegetarian course for dinner; be sure to reserve it by 3pm.) The food, however, is only one of the reasons to stay here. We also like the free bicycles, which you can use to visit the Ise Grand Shrines and the nearby Kawasaki historic district.

2-15-2 Kawasaki, Ise-Shi, Mie 516-0009. ☎ 0596/28-2377. Fax 0596/27-2830. www.hoshidekan.jp. 12 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,800 (\$40) single; ¥8,500 (\$71) double; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple. Rates include tax and service. Breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra; dinner ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra. AE, MC, V. Station: Ise-Shi, then a 7-min. walk in the opposite direction from the shrine; look for the sign on the right that says HOSHIDE. **Amenities:** Macrobiotic restaurant (reservations required); in-room massage; coin-op washer and dryer; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with organic tea, no phone.

TOBA

Thalassa Shima ★★ ★ *Value* Although the approach to this luxury hotel doesn't seem to promise much, inside it's another story. Everything about this sophisticated seaside luxury hotel is focused on its stunningly beautiful setting on the sea, with nary another building in sight. It has a soothing, subdued atmosphere, fitting for a resort dedicated to healing. Thalassa Shima is a French-Japanese joint venture into thalasso therapy, which utilizes seawater, seaweed, and sea-mud treatments to combat stress, fatigue, and excess weight. Although

thalasso therapy has long been popular in France, this modern, striking, and elegant hotel is the first such resort in Japan and attracts mostly Japanese and French living in Japan. My co-author was skeptical that a 1-night stay involving a seaweed bath, an underwater-jet treatment, a massage bath, and pressure therapy could make much difference, but she has to admit she left the hotel much more relaxed and feeling beautiful! Rooms—all of which have small balconies facing the sea—are large, well appointed, and full of amenities. Ask for a room on a higher floor for more expansive sea views, and at check-in, reserve a dinner table at either the **Lumiere** with its nouvelle French cuisine or the classic Japanese restaurant, both with views of the sea. There's a glass-enclosed swimming hotel, as well as a public beach just a short walk away.

Shirahama, Uramura-cho, Toba-shi, Mie 517-0025. ☎ 0599/32-1111. Fax 0599/32-1109. reservation@thalasso.co.jp. 122 units. ¥19,000–¥30,000 (\$158–\$250) per person double occupancy, including breakfast and dinner; more on Sat and holidays. Thalasso therapy treatment ¥14,000 (\$117). 2-night Resort Plan packages from ¥58,000 (\$485) per person, including 4 meals and thalasso therapy. AE, DC, MC, V. Free 25-min. shuttle bus every hour from JR or Kintetsu Toba Station. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (French, Japanese); bar; thalasso therapy center with pool overlooking the bay, exercise room, full French thalasso therapy equipment, massage room, sauna, and Jacuzzi; lounge/library; sundries shop; aesthetic salon; room service (8–10am, noon–5pm, 9:30–10pm); in-room massage; babysitting; dry-cleaning/laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free video movies, minibar, hot-water pot with herb tea and cookies, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale.

KASHIKOJIMA

①17 **Ishiyama-So** ★★ *Finds* If you're looking for an inexpensive, unusual place to stay, a good choice is this family-run Japanese Inn Group member located on a small island just a stone's throw from the Kashikojima pier. It can be reached only via the hotel's own private boat—call to let them know you've arrived at Kashikojima; the boat will arrive shortly, and you'll be delivered right to the ryokan's front door. Although the building itself is concrete, its location on the water gives it a slightly exotic atmosphere, right up to the small crabs that scurry in through the front door. There's a sun deck overlooking the bay (a good place to eat breakfast), you can swim off the dock (because of boat traffic, though, you shouldn't go farther out than the dock), and footpaths crisscross the small island. While the owner speaks English, all rooms are Japanese style and face the bay; meals are also Japanese.

Yokoyama-jima, Kashikojima, Ago-cho, Mie 517-0502. ☎ 0599/52-1527. Fax 0599/52-1240. 6 units (3 with bathroom, 3 with toilet only). ¥5,500 (\$46) single with toilet only, ¥6,000 (\$50) single with bathroom; ¥10,000 (\$83) double with toilet only, ¥11,000 (\$92) double with bathroom. Breakfast ¥500 (\$4.15) extra. Dinner ¥1,500 (\$13) extra. AE, MC, V. A 2-min. walk from the station to Kashikojima pier, then a 2-min. boat trip. *In room:* A/C, coin-op TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

Shima Kanko Hotel ★★ Sitting on a hill above Ago Bay, this is a resort hotel in the old tradition, established in 1951 and boasting impeccable service and great views. It was the hotel of choice of the Showa Emperor; he stayed here five times. The present emperor stayed here in 2001. Most rooms have views of the bay and are spacious, and despite periodic updating, they retain an old-fashioned atmosphere with their shoji screens and wooden furniture. The highest-priced twins facing the bay in the main building are the best; they offer splendid views, large bathrooms with two sinks, and separate washlet toilets. The hotel boasts its own garden (cared for by three gardeners), at the edge of which is the lovely outdoor pool, but if that's not enough, guests can also use an outdoor pool plus the gym and public baths at a nearby sister hotel, reached via shuttle bus. I especially like the pathway leading down to a private dock where

you can sit and watch pearl cultivators at work on their rafts. On the roof is an observatory, great for watching the beautiful sunsets; the coffee shop's outdoor terrace is another wonderful place to soak up the view. Restaurant standouts include the Japanese seafood restaurant with its airy, old-fashioned ambience; and the French restaurant *La Mer*, famous for its abalone. Note that at press time, a special "foreigner rate" of ¥12,000 (\$100) for a twin room was offered; ask whether it's still available.

Ago-cho, Kashikojima, Mie 517-0593. ☎ 0599/43-1211. Fax 0599/43-3538. skh-ms@mint.or.jp. 152 units. ¥16,500–¥20,500 (\$138–\$171) single; ¥18,000–¥30,000 (\$150–\$250) twin; ¥18,000–¥22,000 (\$150–\$183) double; ¥18,000–¥25,000 (\$150–\$208) Japanese-style rooms for 2. Peak season (Golden Week, end of July to Aug, New Year's) ¥5,000 (\$42) extra; Sat and evenings before holidays ¥3,000 (\$25) extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Kashikojima (then free shuttle to hotel or a 5-min. walk). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, French, coffee shop); lounge; outdoor pool with children's slides (free for hotel guests); free use of a nearby sister ryokan with beautiful public baths, outdoor pool, and gym; games arcade; concierge; souvenir shop; room service (8:30–9:30pm); in-room massage; next-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

WHERE TO DINE

Shima Peninsula is understandably famous for its seafood. In addition to the choices below, resorts and hotels throughout the Shima Peninsula offer wonderful seafood dining. For a splurge, I recommend *La Mer* ★★ in the Shima Kanko Hotel (see above), which serves its own delightful French cuisine with a decidedly Japanese twist. Matsuzaka beef, lobster, and abalone are house specialties, with set lunches starting at ¥5,000 (\$42) and set dinners at ¥12,000 (\$100). Reserve a window seat and get there before sunset. It's open daily from 11:30am to 2pm and 5:30 to 8:30pm.

ISE

①18 **Sushi Kyu** ★★ *Kids* SUSHI/LOCAL SPECIALTIES Located on the main street of Oharai-machi in a 130-year-old former ryokan, this traditional restaurant offers tatami seating at low tables with a view out over the river. Even the cashier sits on tatami behind an enclosure, just like the old days. Kimono-clad waitresses serve sushi and local cuisine from a Japanese menu. Try the tekoni sushi (raw bonito marinated with soy sauce and mixed with vinegared rice in a bowl) or the obento of various delicacies. Like many family-type restaurants, there's also a child's plate with rice, soup, fried shrimp, salad, dessert, and drink for ¥600 (\$5).

20 Uji Nakanokiri-machi, Ise. ☎ 0596/27-0229. Set meals ¥900–¥2,000 (\$7.50–\$17). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 11am–8pm; Mon 11am–5pm. Closes at 5:30pm 1st day of the month; open 4:45am–5:30pm last day of the month. Station: Ise-Shi, then bus no. 51 or 55 or the CAN-Bus to the Inner Shrine stop, from which it's a 5-min. walk to Oharai-machi historic district.

TOBA

①19 **Osakaya** SUSHI Located a couple blocks inland from Mikimoto Pearl Island on the other side of the train tracks, this simple local eatery with tatami, table, and counter seating offers assorted sushi platters (*nigiri-zushi*) and sushi rolls (*maki-sushi*), but the specialty is *ebi* fry, humungous shrimp deep-fried in batter. I recommend the set meal for ¥3,300 (\$28), which includes ebi fry, sashimi, rice, soup, and vegetables.

4164 1-chome, Toba. ☎ 0596/25-2336. Maki-sushi ¥600–¥1,800 (\$5–\$15); sushi platter ¥1,500–¥3,500 (\$13–\$29); set meal ¥3,300 (\$28). AE, MC, V. Fri–Wed 11am–2pm and 4–10:30pm (last order). Station: Toba. Walking in the direction of Mikimoto Pearl Island, turn right on Iwasaki Dori; Osakaya will be on the right (look for the fish tank).

3 More of Old Japan: Kanazawa

622km (386 miles) NW of Tokyo; 224km (140 miles) NE of Kyoto

On the northwest coast of Honshu on the Sea of Japan, Kanazawa is the gateway to the rugged, sea-swept Noto Peninsula. It was the second-largest city (after Kyoto) to escape bombing during World War II, and some of the old city has been left intact, including a district of former samurai mansions, old geisha quarters, Edo-Era canals, and tiny narrow streets that run crookedly without rhyme or reason (apparently to confuse any enemies foolish enough to attack). Kanazawa is most famous for its **Kenrokuen Garden**, one of the most celebrated gardens in all of Japan. It's the main reason people come here, though several fine museums nearby are worth a visit, too. Kanazawa is also renowned for its crafts.

Kanazawa first gained notoriety about 500 years ago, when a militant Buddhist sect joined with peasant fanatics to overthrow the feudal lord and establish its own autonomous government, an event unprecedented in Japanese history. The independent republic survived almost 100 years before it was attacked by an army of Oda Nobunaga, who was trying to unite Japan at a time when civil wars wracked the nation. Kanazawa was subsequently granted to one of Nobunaga's retainers, Maeda Toshiie, who constructed a castle and transformed the small community into a thriving castle town. The Maeda clan continued to rule over Kanazawa for the next 300 years, amassing wealth in the form of land and rice and encouraging development of the arts. Throughout the Tokugawa shogunate, the Maedas remained the second-most powerful family in Japan and controlled the largest domain in the country. The arts of Kutani ware, Yuzen silk dyeing, lacquerware, and Noh theater flourished—and enjoy success and popularity in Kanazawa even today. Japan's fourth-largest city at the end of the Feudal Era, Kanazawa now has a population of 457,400 and is capital of Ishikawa Prefecture.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By JR Train** Direct trains from Osaka (via Kyoto) depart half-hourly or hourly; the ride takes less than 3 hours and costs ¥6,930 (\$58) for an unreserved seat. From Nagoya, direct trains depart for Kanazawa every 2 hours and take about 3 hours; the cost is ¥6,620 (\$55) for an unreserved seat.

From Tokyo, take the Joetsu Shinkansen to Echigoyuzawa and switch there for the limited express Hakutaka train to Kanazawa. The trip takes about 4½ hours and costs ¥11,690 (\$97).

By Bus Buses depart four times a day from Ikebukuro Station's east exit in Tokyo, arrive in Kanazawa 7½ hours later, and cost ¥7,840 (\$65). Buses also depart several times daily from Nagoya and Kyoto stations; both trips take about 4 hours and cost ¥4,060 (\$34).

VISITOR INFORMATION Be sure to pick up the flyer "Kanazawa" at the Tourist Information Centers in Tokyo, in Kyoto, at the Narita or Kansai international airports, or at the local **Tourist Information Center** (☎ 076/232-6200) inside Kanazawa Station. To find the center, turn right after passing through the wicket (you'll be heading toward the East Gate exit); it will soon be on your left beside a shopping arcade. Open daily 9am to 7pm (with English-speaking volunteers on duty 10am–6pm), it distributes an excellent map and

brochure in English. You can also book hotel rooms here. Visit the city's home page at www.city.kanazawa.ishikawa.jp.

INTERNET ACCESS The **Ishikawa Foundation for International Exchange**, a 5-minute walk from the east exit of Kanazawa Station (on the road running between the Miyako and Nikko hotels), on the third floor of the Rifare building at 1–5–3 Honmachi (☎ 076/262-5932), has four computers you can use free of charge Monday to Friday 9am to 6pm and Saturday and Sunday 9am to 5pm. There's a sign-up sheet and users are limited to 30 minutes, but the turnover is pretty fast. In the heart of the city, head to **Biz Café**, north of Chuo Dori above Asian Café Cha Cha, 2–2–9 Katamachi (☎ 076/233-7731), where you can log onto the Internet Thursday to Tuesday from 10am to 9pm for the price of a cup of coffee (¥300/\$2.50).

GETTING AROUND Kanazawa's attractions spread south and southeast from the station (take the East Gate exit). Katamachi, a couple miles southeast of the station, is Kanazawa's downtown. Sights are too far-flung to see everything on foot, so the easiest way to get around Kanazawa is by **bus**. All major lines depart from Kanazawa Station, and as many as 15 lines pass Kenrokuen Garden. Take a ticket when boarding the bus and pay when you get off; the fare is ¥200 (\$1.65) to most sights in the city.

Easiest for tourists, however, is the **Kanazawa Loop Bus (Shu-yu Bus)**, which departs from platform 0 at Kanazawa Station's east exit every 15 minutes and travels to all the tourist sites, making 19 stops in a circular route. Stops are announced in English and displayed on a digital board at the front of the bus. A single ride costs ¥200 (\$1.65) and a 1-day pass costs ¥500 (\$4.15). The bus runs daily from 8:30am to 6pm.

You can also travel around Kanazawa by **bicycle**. **JR Rental Cycle** (☎ 076/261-1721; open daily 9am–6pm), at the west exit of Kanazawa Station, rents bicycles for ¥1,200 (\$10) per day.

EXPLORING KANAZAWA

Much of Kanazawa's charm lies in the atmosphere of its old neighborhoods. Be sure to wear your good walking shoes, since the best way to explore various parts of the city is on your own two feet. One suggested itinerary for tackling the city's sights is to take the Loop Bus to the Higashi Chaya district, then another bus onward to Kenrokuen and the sights in its vicinity, and then reboard the bus or walk the 15 minutes to the Nagamachi Samurai district. Directional signs in English to major sights are posted throughout the city. **Note:** What is identified as Saigawa Odori Avenue on the map issued by the tourist office is called Chuo Dori by the locals.

THE TOP ATTRACTION

Kenrokuen Garden ★★ At one time, Kanazawa possessed an impressive castle belonging to the powerful Maeda clan, but it was destroyed by fire several times, the last time in 1881. Near the garden entrance is one of the few original structures remaining, the handsome **Ishikawamon (Ishikawa Gate)**, which used to be the south entrance to the castle. Observing how big and grand the gate is, you can appreciate the size of the original Maeda castle. Remarkably, its roof tiles are actually lead in case emergency dictated they be melted down for musket balls. The area just beyond the gate is the newly created **Kanazawa Castle Park** (☎ 076/234-3800; open Mar–Oct 15 7am–6pm; Oct 16–Feb 8am–4:30pm), which contains a botanical garden and a reconstructed castle

building. Skip the empty reconstruction (admission: ¥300/\$2.50) unless you're especially interested in building techniques, but the botanical garden with its contemporary layout is worth a stroll.

Just southeast of Kanazawa Castle Park is Kanazawa's main attraction, the 10-hectare (25-acre) **Kenrokuen Garden** ★★☆☆. The largest of what are considered to be the three best landscape gardens in Japan—the other two are Kairakuen Garden in Mito and Korakuen Garden in Okayama—it's considered by some to be the grandest. Its name can be translated as “a refined garden incorporating six attributes”—spaciousness, careful arrangement, seclusion, antiquity, elaborate use of water, and scenic charm. Ponds, trees, streams, rocks, mounds, and footpaths have all been combined so aesthetically that the effect is spellbinding. Best of all, unlike most other gardens in Japan, there are no surrounding skyscrapers to detract from the splendid views.

Altogether, it took about 150 years to complete the garden, which served as the outer garden of Kanazawa Castle. The fifth Maeda lord started construction in the 1670s, and successive lords added to it according to their individual tastes. The garden as you now see it was finished by the 12th Maeda lord in 1822; only after the Meiji Restoration was it opened to the public. In addition to cherry trees, irises, ponds, and other elements of natural beauty, there are several historic structures here, including a tea-ceremony house, a former samurai house and, most importantly, Seisonkaku Villa (see below). Plan on 1½ hours of blissful wanderings.

Tip: You may want to arrive at dawn or near the end of the day since Kenrokuen Garden is a favorite destination of Japanese tour groups, led by guides who explain everything in detail—through loudspeakers.

1–4 Kenroku-machi. ☎ **076/234-3800**. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, free for seniors over 65, ¥100 (85¢) children 6–18. Mar to mid-Oct daily 7am–6pm; mid-Oct to Feb daily 8am–4:30pm. Loop Bus: Kenrokuenshita (stop no. 9, 3 min.).

IN THE VICINITY OF KENROKUEN GARDEN

120 Ishikawa Prefectural Art Museum (Ishikawa Kenritsu Bijutsukan) ★★☆☆ *Finds* One of the Maeda clan's lasting contributions was its encouragement of the arts, in full evidence here. Founded to preserve Ishikawa Prefecture's most important cultural resources, this museum houses scrolls, paintings, Kutani ware, and items that may range from samurai costumes belonging to the Maeda family to kimono, as well as contemporary oil paintings and decorative art by artists who were born in Ishikawa, lived here, or had some connection to the prefecture, many of them National Living Treasures. One room is reserved solely for a pair of pheasant-shaped incense burners (by a 17th-century Kyoto potter), National Treasures and among the most valuable pieces in the collection. Otherwise, exhibits change monthly; be sure to take advantage of the English audio guides included in the admission fee, which provide commentary on the individual works of art and their significance. You'll need 45 minutes here.

2–1 Dewa-machi. ☎ **076/231-7580**. Admission ¥350 (\$2.90) adults, ¥280 (\$2.35) students, free for children under 18; more for special exhibits. Daily 9:30am–5pm. Closed 3–4 days monthly during exhibit changes. Loop Bus: Hirosaka (stop no. 10, 4 min.). Just south of Kenrokuen Park, not far from Ishikawa Prefectural Museum for Traditional Products and Crafts.

Ishikawa Prefectural Museum for Traditional Products and Crafts (Ishikawa Kenritsu Dento Sangyo Kogeikan) ★★☆☆ If you have time to visit only one museum in Kanazawa, this is the one to choose. It's by far the best place in town to view and learn about all the beautiful handcrafted items for

which Kanazawa has long been famous. There are explanations in English, a detailed English pamphlet, and an audio guide that describes how the crafts are made. You can see the famous Kutani pottery, first produced under the patronage of the Maeda clan in the 1600s and known for its hues of green, red, purple, navy blue, and yellow, as well as displays of Kaga Yuzen dyeing and hand-painting on silk (Kanazawa is known for its bold and clear picturesque designs). Also on display are Kanazawa lacquerware (which uses raised lacquer painting), paulownia woodcrafts, metalwork, family Buddhist altars, Kanazawa gold leaf, wooden molds for sweets, koto and shamisen stringed instruments, drums, lion masks, bambooware, fishing hooks, flies, rods, folk toys, Japanese paper (*washi*), umbrellas, and even fireworks. Schedule about an hour to appreciate everything.

1–1 Kenroku-machi. ☎ 076/262-2020. Admission ¥250 (\$2.10) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) seniors, ¥100 (85¢) children. Apr–Nov daily 9am–5pm (closed 3rd Thurs of every month); Dec–Mar Fri–Wed 9am–5pm. Loop Bus: Hirosaka (stop no. 10, 6 min.). Next to Seisonkaku Villa.

①21 **Seisonkaku Villa** ★★ Just outside the Kodatsuno (southeast) exit of Kenrokuen Park is this must-see villa, built in 1863 by the 13th Maeda lord as a retirement home for his widowed mother. Elegant and graceful, it has a distinctly feminine atmosphere with delicately carved, brightly painted wood transoms and painted shoji screens. The bedroom is decorated with tortoises painted on the shoji wainscoting; tortoises were associated with long life, and it must have worked—the mother lived to be 84. Expect to linger about 20 minutes here.

1–2 Kenroku-machi. ☎ 076/221-0580. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) junior-high and high-school students, ¥250 (\$2.10) children. Thurs–Tues 9am–5pm. Loop Bus: Hirosaka (stop no. 10, 5 min.). Next to the Ishikawa Prefectural Museum for Traditional Products and Crafts.

THE NAGAMACHI SAMURAI (BUKE YASHIKI) DISTRICT

About a 15-minute walk west of Kenrokuen Garden and just a couple minutes' walk west of Katamachi, Kanazawa's main shopping district, the Nagamachi Samurai District is basically a few streets lined with beautiful wooden homes hidden behind gold-colored mud walls and bordered by canals left over from the Edo Period. An unhurried stroll in the neighborhood will give you an idea of what a feudal castle town might have looked like. But only fleetingly—Lord Maeda had as many as 8,000 samurai retainers, who in turn had their own retainers, making the samurai population here very large indeed. To reach the district from Katamachi, take the side street to the right of the Excel Hotel Tokyo.

Nomura Samurai House ★ Stop 20 minutes here to see how samurai lived back in the Edo Period. Occupied by members of the Nomura family for 10 generations, this traditional Japanese home boasts a drawing room made of Japanese cypress, with elaborate designs in rosewood and shoji screens painted with landscapes, and a tea-ceremony room upstairs (tea costs ¥300/\$2.50). Rooms overlook a small, charming garden with a miniature waterfall, a winding stream, and stone lanterns. Personal effects of the Nomura family and other objects from the Edo Period are on display, including a samurai outfit, the family altar, and a nightingale box (deliberately dark so the nightingale would sing).

1–3–32 Nagamachi. ☎ 076/221-3553. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) high-school students, ¥250 (\$2.10) children. Apr–Sept daily 8:30am–5:30pm; Oct–Mar daily 8:30am–4:30pm. Loop Bus: Korinbo (stop no. 15, 5 min.). Take the side street to the right of the Excel Hotel Tokyo, turn right, and then turn left; look for the samurai outfit at the entrance.

Shinise Memorial Hall This 120-year-old building once served as the Nakaya Chinese Pharmacy, which first opened in 1579 to dispense Chinese medicines and was a familiar landmark in the city. Donated to the city and moved here, it's a good example of a traditional merchant's shop during the Edo Period, with the storefront (once open to the street), the clerk's room, and the shop owner's living quarters complete with tearoom. The second floor serves as a showcase for traditional crafts and tools of the Kanazawa people, with exhibitions that change about three times a year. Worth a 10-minute stop.

2-2-45 Nagamachi. ㊟ 076/220-2524. Free admission. Daily 9:30am-5pm. Loop Bus: Korinbo (stop no. 15, 5 min.).

OTHER SIGHTS

HIGASHI CHAYA DISTRICT There are approximately 50 geisha practicing their trade in three old entertainment quarters in Kanazawa, including this one. A walk here reveals rather solemn-looking, wood-slatted facades of geisha houses dating from the 1820s, where men of means have long come to be entertained with music, dancing, songs, the tea ceremony, poem recitals, and other pleasurable pursuits. Geisha still perform at seven houses in the Higashi Chaya District, but most of the other former geisha homes have been turned into shops and restaurants. For an inside peek at the geisha world, visit the 185-year-old (122) **Shima Geisha House**, 1-13-21 Higashiyama (㊟ 076/252-5675; open daily 9am-6pm), a former tearoom where merchants as well as men of letters came to watch geisha perform. Inside, you'll find rooms that were allotted to personal use, as well as to performing, along with displays of ordinary artifacts from combs, pipes, and game boards to cooking utensils. Architectural details worth noting include: several stairways (so that customers could come and go without being seen); a small Shinto shrine at the entrance to the home; a more elaborate family Buddhist altar in a place of honor in a front room; the gleaming wood-lacquered surfaces of furniture; and the cloisonné door pulls on sliding doors. Admission is ¥400 (\$3.35) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for children; but you'll probably want to stop for tea in the new addition facing a garden, which costs ¥500 to ¥700 (\$4.15-\$5.85) more. It takes only 10 minutes or so to tour the house. To reach it, take the Loop Bus to Hashibacho (stop no. 6); then look for the *Koban* police box with a map of the area.

(123) **MYORYUJI TEMPLE** ★★ Myoryuji Temple (1-2-12 Nomachi; ㊟ 076/241-2877) is popularly known as Ninja-dera (Temple of the Secret Agents) because of its secret chambers, hidden stairways, tunnels, and trick doors. Built by the Maeda clan for family prayer in 1643, it looks rather small from the outside, just two stories high to comply with height restrictions during the Edo Period. Inside, four stories are evident, but even this is false—three more levels are concealed. The fortresslike structure contains an amazing 29 stairways and a labyrinth of corridors, along with such trick devices as pitfalls to trap unsuspecting intruders, slatted stairs where lances could make stabs at passing legs, escape hatches, hidden stairways, and rooms that could be opened only from the outside—just one more example of how deep paranoia ran during the Edo Period. Although rumor has it that a tunnel once connected the temple to the castle, a river running between them makes it unlikely.

Myoryuji Temple can be seen only by phoning ahead for a reservation; chances are good that you'll be able to see it the same day you call. To ensure that you don't get lost (which would be quite easy because of all the trick doors), you'll be grouped with other visitors and led by a guide who, unfortunately,

describes everything in Japanese only. However, demonstrations of the various trick devices are fairly self-explanatory and there's an English pamphlet. Tours, given daily from 9am to 4:30pm (to 4pm in winter), last 30 minutes and cost ¥800 (\$6.65) for adults and ¥600 (\$5) for children (only children over 6 are admitted). To reach it, take the Loop Bus to Jusangenmachi (stop no. 13), cross the bridge you see straight ahead of you, take the second left (Teramachi), and then take the first right. It will be on your right.

SHOPPING

Kanazawa's most famous products are its **Kutani pottery**, with its bright five-color overglaze patterns, and its hand-painted **Yuzen silk**. Kanazawa also produces maki-e lacquerware, sweets, toys, wooden products, and almost all of Japan's gold leaf. For convenient shopping for these and other souvenirs, try the **Omiyage Kan shopping arcade** right in Kanazawa Station.

For department stores, boutiques, and contemporary shops, visit the **Kata-machi and Tatemachi shopping streets**, within walking distance of Kenrokuen Garden and the Nagamachi Samurai district. **Omicho Market**, just off Hyakumangoku Dori between the station and Kenrokuen Garden, is the city market with more than 200 stalls selling seafood, vegetables, and fruit.

Ishikawa Prefectural Products Center (Kanko Bussankan) Located just north of Kenrokuen Garden, this is the place to come for one-stop shopping of all the products Ishikawa Prefecture is famous for. The ground floor sells crafts ranging from lacquerware and pottery to glassware and toys, while the second floor houses a restaurant. Open daily 10am to 6pm (closed some Tues Nov–Mar). 2–20 Kenroku-machi. ☎ 076/222-7788. Loop Bus: Kenrokushita (stop no. 9, 2 min). Backtrack to Hyakumangoku Dori and turn right.

(124) **Kaga Yuzen** Skip the ground-floor museum with its explanations in Japanese and instead take the stairs to the left of the entryway to the basement shop, where you can purchase scarves, purses, fans, ties, clothing, *furoshiki* (traditionally used for wrapping presents), and other items made from hand-dyed Yuzen cloth, which borrows heavily from nature for its designs—mainly flowers, animals, and landscapes. Open Thursday to Tuesday 9am to 5pm. 8–8 Kosho-machi. ☎ 076/224-5511. Loop Bus: Kenrokushita (stop no. 9, 2 min.). Cross Hyakumangoku Dori and turn right, then left after the car park.

Kutani Kosen Pottery Kiln (Kutani Kosengama) If your interest lies in pottery, it's worth a visit to this Kutani-ware kiln and shop, open since 1870 and about a 10-minute walk from Myoruyji Temple. In addition to browsing its showroom, you can also see the entire process of producing handmade Kutani ware, including the kilns heated by pine and the painting, on a 15-minute tour led by a guide who speaks some English. Open daily 9am to noon and 1 to 5pm. 5–3–3 Nomachi. ☎ 076/241-0902. City Bus: 20 min. from Kanazawa Station to the Nomachi Eki stop (1 min).

(125) **Sakuda** Thinking about wallpapering a room in gold leaf? Then you'll certainly want to pay a visit to Sakuda, located in a modern building in the Higashi Chaya district. (As much as 98% of Japan's entire national output of gold leaf is produced in Kanazawa.) Here you can watch artisans at work, pounding the gold leaf and spreading it until it's paper-thin and translucent; it's the equivalent of pounding a ¥10 coin into the size of a tatami mat. But most people come here to shop for gold-leafed vases, boxes, chopsticks, bowls, trays,

screens, furniture, and—this being Japan—golf balls and clubs. You can even buy gold flakes to add to your coffee or sake. Don't miss the second-floor bath-rooms; the women's is done entirely in gold leaf, the men's in platinum. The staff was serving complimentary tea spiked with gold leaf to everyone who dropped by during my last visit. Open daily 9am to 6pm. 1-3-27 Higashiyama. ☎ 076/251-6777. Loop Bus: Hashibacho (stop no. 6, 4 min.).

⑫⑥ **Shamisen no Fukushima** *Finds* There used to be other makers of the three-stringed *shamisen* instrument in Kanazawa to keep the geisha supplied with one of the tools of their trade, but this shop in the Higashi Chaya District is the only one remaining. While you may not be in the market for a shamisen, you can have a 30-minute lesson in English (¥300/\$2.50; reservations required) from 10am to 4pm, followed by a cup of tea. You can also visit the small show-room upstairs where you can see how these instruments are made, including the cat and dog skin used to cover the sound box (cat skin is more expensive). Open Monday to Saturday 8:30am to 6pm; closed the second and fourth Saturdays of the month and holidays. 1-1-8 Higashiyama. ☎ 076/252-3703. Loop Bus: Hashibacho (stop no. 6, 2 min.). On Kannon-machi street.

⑫⑦ **Tawaraya Ame** *Kids* They've been selling Japanese confectionery from this traditional wood-slatted building for more than 170 years. Tawaraya makes two types of candy from rice and barley, using malt instead of sugar, and now touts the candy as health food. One of the candies is soft like honey, purportedly developed for babies who, for one reason or another, could not be breast fed. The other is hard and comes in a wooden bucket; the staff recommends breaking the hard candy with a hammer (kids love this) and putting it in a refrigerator. Soft lollipops and hard candy (true jawbreakers!) are also available. Open Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm; Sunday 9am to 5pm. 2-4 Kobashi-machi. ☎ 076/252-2079. Loop Bus: Kobashi (stop no. 3, 2 min.). Cross the bridge and turn left.

WHERE TO STAY EXPENSIVE

Most of the expensive accommodations and some of the moderately priced hotels add a surcharge averaging ¥1,000 (\$8.35) per person during peak season—New Year's, Golden Week (Apr 29–May 5), and mid-July through mid-November. We've indicated those that do in the listings below.

Directions are from Kanazawa Station; minutes in parentheses indicate the walking time required from the bus stop.

ANA Hotel Kanazawa ★★ This sleek, curved, white building soaring next to Kanazawa Station is part of the ANA conglomerate that includes All Nippon Airways. It offers convenient access to the station, good service, and varied dining choices (including a summertime beer garden and a 19th-floor teppanyaki restaurant with good views). The marbled lobby is filled with the sounds of a cascading waterfall, and a river of chandeliers shimmers from the atrium above. Rooms are simple, comfortable, and uncluttered, with everything you'd expect from one of Kanazawa's best hotels. Since the cheapest rooms are on lower floors facing another building, consider spending a bit more for a higher room overlooking the station.

16-3 Showa-machi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-8518. ☎ 800/ANA-HOTELS in the U.S. and Canada or 076/224-6111. Fax 076/224-6100. www.anahotels.com. 254 units. ¥12,000–¥14,000 (\$100–\$117) single; ¥19,000–¥25,000 (\$158–\$208) double; ¥23,000–¥46,000 (\$192–\$383) twin. Peak season ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra per person. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Kanazawa (east exit, 1 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese,

teppanyaki, Chinese, coffee shop); bar; lounge; salon; room service (7am–11pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Hotel Nikko Kanazawa ★★ Owned by rival Japan Airlines and giving the ANA Hotel across the street a run for its money, this 29-story high-rise was designed by a Japanese-French team, who succeeded in giving it a boutique-hotel ambience despite its size. Its lobby exudes an exotic, French-colonial atmosphere, adorned with a bubbling fountain, rattan chairs stuffed with pillows, fake trees, antiques, and Asian decorative art ranging from ginger jars to Japanese lacquered boxes. The English-speaking concierge staff receives high marks. Rooms are spacious, all with double-size or larger beds and decent-size bathrooms. Sink areas are separated from the bathrooms in doubles and twins, the most expensive of which add vanities. Higher-priced rooms offer great views from Kanazawa's tallest building.

2–15–1 Hon-machi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-0853. ☎ **800/NIKKO-US** (800/645-5687) in the U.S. and Canada or 076/234-1111. Fax 076/234-8802. www.hnkanazawa.co.jp. 260 units. ¥13,000–¥14,500 (\$108–\$121) single; ¥24,000–¥25,000 (\$200–\$208) double; ¥26,000–¥29,000 (\$217–\$242) twin. Executive floor from ¥14,500 (\$121) single; ¥30,000 (\$250) twin. ¥1,000 (\$8.35) added Sat and nights before holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Kanazawa (east exit, 1 min.). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; bar; lounge; access to next-door health club with indoor pool (fee: ¥2,100/\$18); concierge; shopping arcade; salon; room service (7am–10pm); in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

APA Hotel Kanazawa-Ekimae Although just a business hotel, this place does have a special feature that sets it apart—large public baths complete with sauna and a rooftop outdoor bath, all free to hotel guests. Other pluses: a convenient location just steps away from Kanazawa Station; bold use of bright colors that are a welcome relief from the usual bland white of most business hotels; and a Seattle's Best cafe (a Starbucks wannabe). If you're not a fan of public baths, however, you might choose to stay elsewhere; the hotel is not geared toward tourists, little English is spoken, and rooms are so minuscule that if you open your luggage you may have to leap to reach your bed. Even the deluxe corner rooms would be considered small in a regular hotel. But rooms are clean and have basic necessities, including small windows that open.

If you'd rather be in the heart of the city, the newly opened **APA Hotel Kanazawa-Chuo**, 1–5–24 Katamachi (☎ 076/235-2111; fax 076/235-2112), offers similar-size rooms at the same rates, except the water tapped for its public bath is from hot springs.

1–9–28 Hirooka, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-0031. ☎ **076/231-8111**. Fax 076/231-8112. 456 units. ¥7,000–¥8,000 (\$58–\$67) single; ¥11,000 (\$92) double; ¥12,000–¥16,000 (\$100–\$133) twin. AE, MC, V. Station: Kanazawa (west exit, 2 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (French, Japanese, Western, coffee shop); bar; public baths with sauna (free for hotel guests); in-room massage; coin-op washer and dryer; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Kanazawa Manten ★ *Value* A fountain at the entrance, a front desk backed by trees, jazz playing in the hotel restaurant, and attentive service all conspire to make this business hotel seem like it's more expensive than it is. Alas, the overwhelmingly single rooms are no different or larger than those of any other business hotel, with semi-double-size beds that take up most of the floor space. On the bright side, the windows can be opened or covered by panels for complete darkness. There are 72 twin rooms and 10 doubles. There's no hot-water pot

with tea in the rooms, but on each floor there's a convenience corner with hot water and cups, as well as a microwave, trouser press, and vending machines. In short, the cramped quarters and self-serve philosophy of the upper floors reinforce the business-hotel status, but at least in the lobby you can feel grand.

1–6–1 Kita-yasue, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-0022. ☎ **076/265-0100**. Fax 076/265-0120. 551 units. ¥5,500 (\$46) single; ¥11,000 (\$92) twin or double. AE, MC, V. Station: Kanazawa (west exit, 3 min). Turn right out of the station's west exit. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); lounge; in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Kanazawa Miyako Hotel Don't be turned off by the hotel's cheerless, aging exterior and functional lobby—all of the rooms have been nicely updated and, except for the singles, are among the largest for their price in Kanazawa. Add to that the Miyako name (synonymous with friendly service), a discount for Frommer's readers, nonsmoking restaurants (a rarity in Japan), and a convenient location (linked to the station via an underground passage), and you'll see why I like this lodging. There's even a floor for ladies, decorated in pastel colors and with a vanity and toiletry bag that includes a pedicure kit, bath gel, and other female-oriented amenities. I also like rooms facing the station's bus terminal; when a Loop Bus pulls out, I know I have 15 minutes to make the next one. Be sure to mention Frommer's when you make a reservation.

6–10 Konohanacho, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-0852. ☎ **076/261-2111**. Fax 076/261-2113. www.miyakohotels.ne.jp/kanazawa. 193 units. ¥10,000–¥12,000 (\$83–\$100) single; ¥16,000–¥24,000 (\$133–\$200) double; ¥18,000–¥28,000 (\$150–\$233) twin. 10% discount and complimentary breakfast for Frommer's readers. AE, MC, V. Station: Kanazawa (east exit, 1 min). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Western); bar/lounge; summertime beer garden; tour desk; salon; room service (7am–11:30pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

Ryokan Murataya This Japanese Inn Group ryokan is in the heart of Kanazawa, not far from Katamachi and Tatemachi shopping streets and within walking distance of Kenrokuen. It's modern and rather uninteresting from the outside but comfortable and pleasant inside. All rooms are clean and are Japanese-style without bathrooms. The inn has its own map of the Katamachi area, showing the locations of banks, post offices, stores, and restaurants.

1–5–2 Katamachi, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-0981. ☎ **076/263-0455**. Fax 076/263-0456. murtaya@spacelan.ne.jp. 11 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,500 (\$38) single; ¥8,500 (\$71) twin; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple. Continental breakfast ¥450 (\$3.75) extra; Japanese breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra. AE, MC, V. Bus: From platform 6, 7, or 8 to Katamachi, take a 3-min. walk. Take the small pedestrian lane on the right side of the APA Hotel and then turn left. **Amenities:** Coin-operated washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

⑩28 **Yougetsu** ★★ *Finds* This delightful little *minshuku*, a 100-plus-year-old house that once belonged to geisha, has a picturesque location right on the main street of the Higashi Chaya district. The rooms, in different sizes, are rather plain (I prefer those on the 2nd floor that face the front, where you can sit by the window and watch the pedestrians), but the quiet, quaint surroundings and cleanliness make up for the lack of decor. The second-floor rooms are air-conditioned. No meals are served.

1–13–22 Higashiyama, Kanazawa, Ishikawa 920-0831. ☎ **076/252-0497**. 5 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) per person. No credit cards. Loop Bus or City Bus no. 11 or 12 (going in the direction of Morimoto or Naruwa): Hashibacho (4 min.). *In room:* A/C (in some), TV (some are coin-op), hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Kanazawa's local specialties, known collectively as **Kaga Ryori**, consist of seafood, such as tiny shrimp and winter crabs, as well as freshwater fish, duck, and mountain vegetables.

All directions are from Kanazawa Station.

AROUND KANAZAWA STATION

Le Grand Chariot ★★ FRENCH This combination lounge and restaurant is decorated in such a riot of colors that it looks like a kaleidoscope gone awry. The hotel describes it as “Arabic imagination”—whatever. The sophisticated lounge occupies the center of the room, while dining tables line windows at either side with the best ringside views. Since this is the highest spot in Kanazawa, the views are great, particularly at sunset, making this a good romantic splurge. From the west windows you can even see the Japan Sea in the distance. The menu has only a few a la carte choices and is mostly for fixed-price meals (about five main courses of meat or seafood) that change but have included options like snapper with sauce Provençale or lobster with rice in a truffle sauce, all artfully presented though portions can be small. Live music serenades you from 8:30 to 11pm, but the ¥800 (\$6.65) cover charge is waived for diners.

Hotel Nikko Kanazawa, 30th floor, 2-15-1 Hon-machi. ☎ 076/234-1111. Set lunch ¥2,000–¥4,000 (\$17–\$33); set dinner ¥5,000–¥10,000 (\$42–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9:30pm (last order). Station: Kanazawa (east exit, 1 min.).

AROUND KENROKUEN GARDEN

Hana Anzu VARIED JAPANESE/KAGA Convenient to Kenrokuen Garden's main (north) entrance and located on the second floor of the Ishikawa Prefectural Products Center (where you'll probably want to do some shopping), this traditionally decorated restaurant specializes in Kaga cuisine. The most popular set lunch is the Osusume bento (local dishes that change with the season) for ¥1,800 (\$15). More expensive is the Okonomi mini-kaiseki, which costs ¥3,800 (\$32) and features a duck stew. Although the menu is in Japanese only, photos translate for you.

Ishikawa Prefectural Products Center, 2nd floor, 2-20 Kenrokumachi. ☎ 076/222-5188. Set meal ¥1,200–¥3,800 (\$10–\$32). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–6pm (closed Tues Dec–Mar). Loop Bus: Kenrokuenshita (stop no. 9, 2 min.).

(129) **Miyoshian** ★★ Finds KAGA KAISEKI A great place to try the local Kaga cuisine right in Kenrokuen Garden, this 100-year-old restaurant consists of three separate wooden buildings, the best of which is a traditional room extending over a large pond. This is where you'll probably dine, seated on tatami with a view of an ancient pond (giant carp swim in the murky waters). Only set meals of Kaga cuisine are served, all featuring *jibuni* (a duck-and-vegetable stew eaten primarily in winter). The more expensive the meal, the more dishes it adds. The ¥1,500 (\$13) meal includes soup, jibuni, sashimi, a seasonal dish like eel on rice, pickles, a Japanese sweet, and thick green tea. The ¥3,000 (\$25) meal adds dishes like salmon, crab, tofu, and various small delicacies. You can also come just for green tea and sweets for ¥500 to ¥600 (\$4.15–\$5).

Kenrokuen Garden, 1-11 Kenrokumachi. ☎ 076/221-0127. Kaga teishoku ¥1,500–¥3,000 (\$13–\$25). MC, V. Thurs–Tues 11am–2:30pm. Loop Bus: Kenrokuenshita (stop no. 9), then turn right after entering the park (5 min.).

KATAMACHI & THE NAGAMACHI SAMURAI DISTRICT

Just north of the Saigawa Ohashi Bridge is an area full of restaurants and drinking establishments, radiating from Katamachi Shopping Street and Saigawa Odori (called Chuo Dori by the locals).

Aglio Olio PASTA Located beside a flowing canal between Katamachi and the Nagamachi Samurai District, this simple eatery with only a few tables and a counter is owned by a *nisei* (2nd-generation Japanese) from Brazil who offers a few pasta dishes like lasagna or spaghetti with a beef tomato sauce. The lunch special, which changes daily, includes pasta, salad, and bread.

1–12–10 Korinbo. ☎ 076/260-8223. Pasta ¥850–¥1,100 (\$7.10–\$9.15); set lunches ¥900 (\$7.50). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2pm and 6–10pm. Loop Bus: Korinbo (stop no. 15, 3 min.). Take the side street to the right of the Excel Hotel Tokyu and turn right; it will be on the right, across the small canal.

⑬⑩ **Hamacho** ★ JAPANESE SEAFOOD Hamacho offers seafood and vegetables in season; the menu, written on a blackboard but in Japanese only, changes according to what's fresh and available and may include *imo* (Japanese potatoes), freshly picked mushrooms, vegetables, various seafood selections, and sashimi. Just tell Mr. Ishigami, the owner and chief chef, how much you want to spend and he'll do the rest. If there's anything you don't like, be sure to tell him that, too. Sit at the counter where you can watch the preparation of your set meal, which may include grilled fish or shrimp, noodles, tofu, sashimi, soup, and vegetables.

2–27–24 Katamachi. ☎ 076/233-3390. Reservations recommended. Set meals ¥6,000–¥10,000 (\$50–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5pm–midnight. Closed holidays. Loop Bus: Katamachi (stop no. 14, 2 min.). From the bus stop, backtrack to Saigawa Dori and turn right (west); it's set back from the road on the left, beside a small canal.

Kincharyo VARIED JAPANESE This, without a doubt, is Katamachi's easiest restaurant to find: It's located on the third floor of the very visible Excel Hotel Tokyu. Sister restaurant to a famous 80-year-old restaurant in the Tera-machi Temple district (near Myoryuji Temple), this one is popular with Japanese women. For lunch there's tempura, mini-kaiseki (¥4,300/\$36), sushi, and more, but most popular is the obento for ¥1,800 to ¥3,500 (\$15–\$29)—so popular, in fact, that it sometimes runs out. Set dinners include tempura, Kaga kaiseki, sushi, shabu-shabu, and more.

Tokyu Hotel, 2–1–1 Korinbo. ☎ 076/263-5511. Set lunch ¥1,800–¥6,000 (\$15–\$50); set dinner ¥3,500–¥10,000 (\$29–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm (last order). Loop Bus: Kohrinbo (stop no. 15, 1 min.).

⑬① **Kitama** ★★ VARIED JAPANESE/KAGA Sitting on tatami mats, you'll have a pleasant view of moss-covered greenery at this modern restaurant with a 140-year-old history. The Kojitsu obento (¥2,000/\$17), served in an upright lunch box, features sashimi, small pieces of pork and fish, fried shrimp, a soy-bean patty, and various seasonal vegetables. The jibuni teishoku (¥1,500/\$13), with duck stew, clear soup, pickled vegetables, rice, and hors d'oeuvres, is also quite satisfying. The restaurant is also known for its tempura and (by reservation only) kaiseki meals starting at ¥5,000 (\$42).

2–3–3 Katamachi. ☎ 076/261-7176. Set meal ¥1,000–¥3,800 (\$8.35–\$32). MC, V. Daily 11:30am–8:30pm (last order). Closed irregularly. Loop Bus: Katamachi (stop no. 14, 2 min.). From the intersection of Katamachi and Saigawa Dori, walk 1 block west on Chuo Dori and turn right; the restaurant will be on your left with a display case and bamboo fence at its entrance.

HIGASHI CHAYA DISTRICT

(132) To Mu ★ *Finds* **VARIED JAPANESE** To Mu translates roughly as “rabbit dream,” and maybe that’s what that rabbit on the shoji screen is doing as it contemplates the moon. Otherwise, there’s no rhyme or reason to this restaurant’s name, but no doubt the geisha and their patrons who used to frequent this former teahouse had dreams of their own, none of which involved rabbits. Ground-floor dining is at a huge wooden slab of a counter, with leg wells for those errant appendages and a small outdoor garden to look at beyond the open kitchen. Upstairs it’s tables and chairs on tatami, which the Japanese find very weird. At any rate, this is one of the most popular restaurants of the moment, good for a light lunch (served 11:30am–2:30pm) that might include minced pork with tofu, udon noodles, or seasonal specials along with rice, salad, pickled vegetables, soup, and coffee or dessert. You can also come just for dessert; if you’ve never had ice cream made from green tea or sweet red beans, order it here. 1–26–16 Higashiyama. ☎ **076/253-3112**. Set lunch ¥1,200–¥1,400 (\$10–\$12). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 10am–4pm. Loop Bus: Hashibacho (stop no. 6, 4 min.).

ELSEWHERE

(133) Kotobuki-Ya ★★ ★ *Finds* **VEGETARIAN** Specializing in *shojin ryori* (Buddhist vegetarian cooking), Kotobuki-ya is in a beautiful 160-year-old merchant’s house with a two-story airy entryway. Dining here, on beautiful lacquer and pottery tableware, is a wonderful experience—not surprisingly, they have had many fine reviews. For lunch, you can dine for ¥2,500 (\$21) on the shojin ryori obento (not available Sun); for ¥300 (\$2.50) more per person, you can have your own private tatami room. Lunch kaiseki costs ¥5,200 (\$43), and the price already includes your private room. Kaiseki dinners are vegetarian or with fish, and private rooms cost ¥800 (\$6.65) more per person. Two of the rooms have views of the garden.

2–4–13 Owari-cho. ☎ **076/231-6245**. Reservations required by 4pm for dinner. Set lunch ¥2,500–¥5,200 (\$21–\$43); kaiseki dinner ¥7,000–¥12,000 (\$58–\$100). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–7pm (last order). Loop Bus: Musashigatsuji (stop no. 18, 3 min.). On a side street north of Hyakumangoku Dori, behind Eneos gas station.

4 Osaka

553km (343 miles) W of Tokyo; 42km (26 miles) SW of Kyoto; 339km (212 miles) E of Hiroshima

Although its history stretches back almost 1,500 years, Osaka first gained prominence when Hideyoshi Toyotomi, the most powerful lord in the land, built Japan’s most magnificent castle here in the 16th century. To develop resources for his castle town, he persuaded merchants from other parts of the nation to resettle in Osaka. During the Edo Period, the city became an important distribution center as feudal lords from the surrounding region sent their rice to merchants in Osaka, who in turn sent the rice onward to Tokyo and other cities. As the merchants prospered, the town grew and such arts as Kabuki and Bunraku flourished. With money and leisure to spare, the merchants also developed a refined taste for food.

Nowadays, Osaka, capital of Osaka Prefecture on the southern coast of western Honshu, is the mover and shaker of this region of Japan, known as Kansai. An industrial city with a population of about 2.6 million, it’s the third-most populated city in Japan (after Tokyo and Yokohama). The legacy of the city’s commercial beginnings is still present—Osakans are usually characterized as being outgoing and clever at money affairs: One Osakan greeting is “Are you

making any money?" Osaka has a reputation throughout Japan as an international and progressive business center and is known for its food, castle, port, underground shopping arcades, and Bunraku puppet theater. It also boasts the oldest state temple in Japan, one of nation's best aquariums, and the only Universal Studios outside the United States. Because of its international airport, it also serves as a major gateway to the rest of Japan. Indeed, some travelers base themselves in Osaka, taking day trips to Kyoto, Nara, Kobe, and Mount Koya.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE

BY PLANE Osaka's **Kansai International Airport (KIX; ☎ 0724/ 55-2500)** receives both domestic and international flights; for details on the international carriers that fly here, see "Getting There," in chapter 2.

The two major domestic airlines that fly into KIX are **All Nippon Airways (ANA; ☎ 800/235-9262** in the U.S. and Canada, toll-free 0120/029-222 in Japan) and **Japan Airlines (☎ 800/525-3663** in the U.S. and Canada, toll-free 0120/25-5971 in Japan). From Tokyo's Haneda and Narita airports, flight time is about 1 to 1¼ hours; at press time, the fare averaged ¥16,700 to ¥18,500 (\$139–\$154) one-way.

Arriving at KIX Arriving at KIX, you experience Japan at its modern best. Constructed on a huge synthetic island 4.8km (3 miles) off the mainland in Osaka Bay and connected to the city by a six-lane highway and two-rail line bridge, this 24-hour airport boasts the latest in technology—glass elevators ferry passengers to the four floors of the complex in an atrium setting, touch screens provide information in many languages, and if you arrive on an international flight, you'll board the driverless, computer-controlled Wing Shuttle to get to the central terminal. And, like the city itself, it's traveler-friendly: Signs are clear and abundant, and facilities—which range from restaurants and shops to a **post office** (2nd floor south, near JAL counter; open daily 8am–7pm), **ATMs** that accept foreign credit cards, a children's **playroom** in the international departure area (free of charge), the **Kanku Lounge** with Internet access (2nd floor north, ☎ 0724/55-2092; open daily 9am–9pm), and **dental and medical clinics**—are seemingly endless.

Impressions

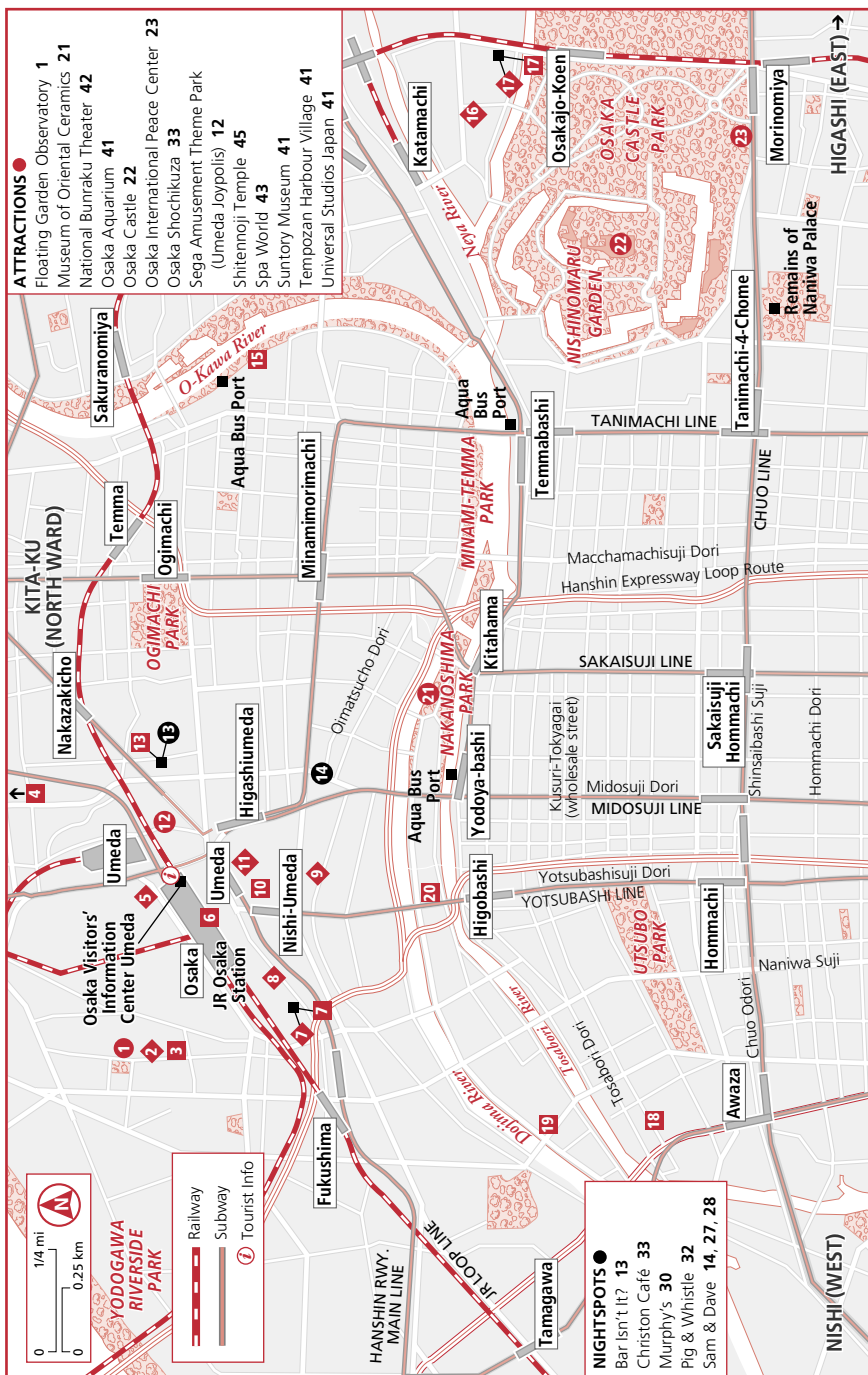
In trade it is a Chicago. In situation it is a Venice.

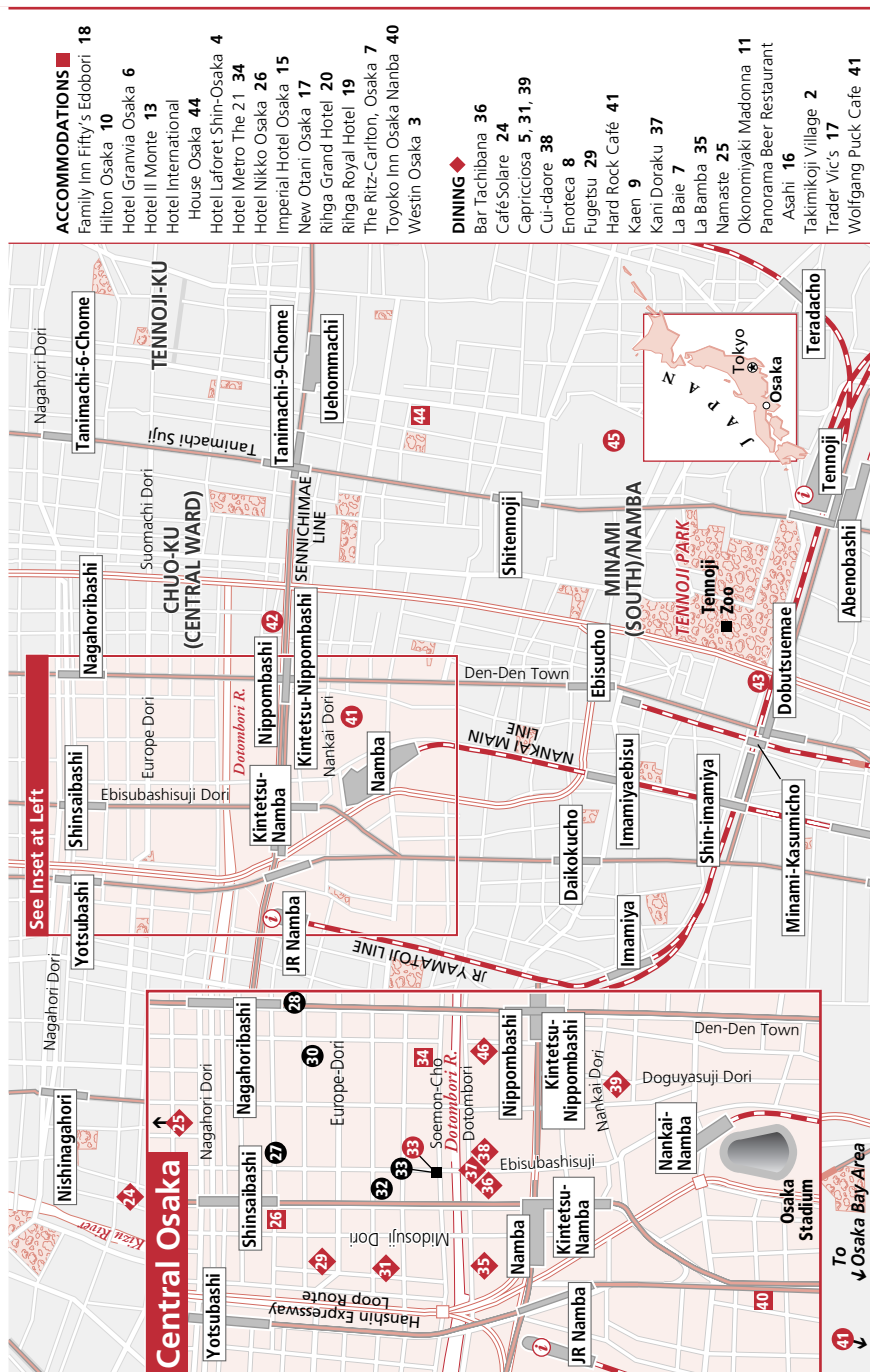
—John Foster Fraser, *Round the World on a Wheel* (1899),
on Osaka

Getting from KIX to Osaka Taxis are prohibitively expensive: expect to spend \$200 for a cab to the city center. Easiest, especially if you have luggage, is the **Kansai Airport Transportation Enterprise (☎ 0724/61-1374; www.kate.co.jp)**, which provides bus service to major stations and hotels in Osaka. Most fares cost ¥1,300 (\$11), and tickets can be purchased at counters in the arrival lobby. Another bus service, the **OCAT Shuttle 880 (☎ 06/6635-3030)**, travels from KIX to the Osaka City Air Terminal (a downtown bus station for shuttle buses going to the airport), next to JR Namba Station (the major train station in Namba) in the heart of Osaka, every 30 minutes for ¥880 (\$7.35).

If you're taking the **train** into Osaka (stations: Osaka, Tennoji, or Shin-Osaka) or even farther to Kyoto, simply walk through KIX's second-floor connecting concourse (baggage carts are designed to go on escalators and as far as train ticket gates) and board the limited express **JR Haruka**, which travels to Tennoji and

Osaka





Shin-Osaka stations before continuing to Kyoto. The fare to Shin-Osaka is ¥2,470 (\$21) for the 45-minute trip, with departures generally twice an hour. Slower is the **JR rapid (JR Kanku Kaisoku)**, which travels from the airport to Tennoji and Osaka stations before continuing to Kobe. The 65-minute trip to Osaka Station costs ¥1,160 (\$9.70).

If you have a **Japan Rail Pass**, you can ride these trains for free. Exchange your voucher at the Kansai Airport (rail) Station on the third floor (open daily 5:30am–11pm).

Next to the JR trains in the same station at the airport is the private **Nankai Line**, which has three types of trains to Namba Nankai Station. The sleek **rapit a** (pronounced *rapito alpha*) train reaches Namba in 30 minutes. There's one train an hour, and ordinary reserved seats cost ¥1,390 (\$12). The **rapit b** (*rapito beta*) at the same price stops at more stations, including Sakai, and takes 35 minutes. You can also take an ordinary **Nankai Express Line** for ¥890 (\$7.40) and reach Namba in 45 minutes.

Itami Airport If you're arriving on a domestic flight, chances are you'll arrive at Itami Airport (☎ 06/6856-6781), north of the city. Buses connect to various parts of Osaka; to Osaka Station, the ride takes 25 minutes and costs ¥620 (\$5.20).

BY TRAIN Osaka is 2¾ hours from Tokyo by Shinkansen bullet train; tickets are ¥13,240 (\$110) for an unreserved seat (the Nozomi Shinkansen is more expensive). All Shinkansen bullet trains arrive at **Shin-Osaka Station** at the city's northern edge. To get from Shin-Osaka Station to Osaka Station and other points south, use the most convenient public transportation, the **Midosuji Line** subway; the subway stop at Osaka Station is called **Umeda Station**. **JR trains** also make runs between Shin-Osaka and Osaka stations.

If you haven't turned in your voucher for your **Japan Rail Pass** yet, you can do so at Osaka Station's or Shin-Osaka Station's Green Windows (open daily 5:30am–11pm), as well as at Osaka Station's Travel Information Satellite (TiS) on the main floor (daily 10am–7pm, to 6pm Sun and holidays) and at the Shin-Osaka Station's TiS on the second floor (daily 7am–8pm).

If you're arriving in Osaka from Kobe or Kyoto, the commuter lines, which will deliver you directly to Osaka Station in the heart of the city, are more convenient than the Shinkansen, which will deposit you at out-of-the-way Shin-Osaka Station.

BY BUS **JR night buses** depart from both Tokyo (Yaesu exit; ☎ 03/3215-1468) and Shinjuku (new south exit; ☎ 03/5379-0874) stations several times nightly, arriving at Osaka Station the next morning. The trip from Tokyo takes about 8 hours and costs ¥8,610 (\$80). Cheaper yet are **JR day buses** from Tokyo Station to Osaka Station costing ¥6,000 (\$50), and once-a-night JR buses from both Tokyo and Shinjuku stations costing only ¥5,000 (\$42). Tickets can be bought at any major JR station or at a travel agency.

VISITOR INFORMATION

AT THE AIRPORT The **Kansai Tourist Information Center** (☎ 0724/56-6025; open daily 9am–9pm) is near the south end of the International Arrivals Lobby. The multilingual staff can help with general travel information about Japan and hotel reservations, and they offer brochures and maps.

IN TOWN At **Osaka Station**, the **Visitors Information Center Umeda** (☎ 06/6345-2189; open daily 8am–8pm) is at the east (Midosuji) exit of JR Osaka Station in a kiosk beside the bus terminal; the English-speaking staff gives out good maps of the city and assists you in securing hotel rooms. Another center is just east

of the central exit of **Shin-Osaka Station** on the third floor (☎ 06/6305-3311; open daily 8am–8pm). Note that if you're arriving by Shinkansen, you'll be up on the fourth floor, so simply go down one flight to the tourist office. At **JR Namba Station**, you'll find the **Visitors Information Center Namba** (☎ 06/6643-2125; open daily 8am–8pm) in the basement of the Osaka City Air Terminal (OCAT) Building. Other tourist information centers are located just outside **Universal City Station** (☎ 06/4804-3824; open daily 9am–8pm) and at **JR Tennoji Station** (☎ 06/6774-3077; open daily 8am–8pm).

To find out what's going on in Osaka, pick up a copy of *Kansai Time Out*, a monthly magazine with information on sightseeing, festivals, restaurants, and other items of interest pertaining to Osaka, Kobe, and Kyoto. It sells for ¥300 (\$2.50) at bookstores, restaurants, tourist information offices, and places frequented by English-speaking tourists, and it's sometimes available for free at major hotels. *Kansai Scene* (www.kansaiscene.com) is a free bilingual magazine also available online with articles, reviews, listings, and information on the Kansai area.

Another source of information available free at the tourist offices and at many hotels is *Meet Osaka*, a quarterly pamphlet with maps and information on sightseeing, Bunraku, festivals, concerts, and special exhibits and events. Look, too, for the free *Osaka Event and Tourist Guide*, published every 2 months by the Osaka Convention and Tourism Bureau with information on special events, museum exhibitions, concert information, and even which nearby beaches are open in summer. Finally, Osaka has a Web home page in English at www.tourism.city.osaka.jp.

CONSULATES Several embassies maintain consulates in Osaka, including **Australia** (☎ 06/6941-9271 or 06/6941-9448); **Canada** (☎ 06/6212-4910); **Great Britain** (☎ 06/6120-5600); and the **United States** (☎ 06/6315-5900).

INTERNET ACCESS Internet access is available at two locations inside Osaka Station, though they're difficult to find. **Kinko's**, on the north concourse, between the east and central passages and across from JTB (☎ 06/6442-3700), is open daily 7am to 10:30pm and charges ¥200 (\$1.65) for 10 minutes of computer use. Nearby, up a narrow flight of stairs, is the **complex café [X-Time]** Internet café (☎ 06/6341-8222), which charges ¥250 (\$2.10) for 30 minutes on the computer.

MAIL The Central Post Office, or Osaka Chuo Yubinkyoku (☎ 06/6347-8006), a minute's walk west of Osaka Station, is open 24 hours for mail. For postal service information in English, call ☎ 06/6944-6245 Monday to Saturday 9:30am to 4:30pm.

ORIENTATION

Osaka is divided into various wards, or *ku*, the most important of which for visitors are Kita-ku (North Ward), which encompasses the area around Osaka Station; and Chuo-ku (Central Ward), where you'll find Osaka Castle and Namba, the heart of the city. Some city maps divide Osaka by location: Kita (North), around Osaka Station; Minami (South), around Namba and Shinsaibashi; Higashi (East), around Osaka Castle; and Nishi (West) which is Osaka's bay area. Shin-Osaka Station, three subway stations north of Osaka (Umeda) Station, is a tourist wasteland, though it does have a few hotels.

AROUND OSAKA STATION **Kita-ku** embraces the area around Osaka and Umeda stations and includes many of the city's top hotels, the city's tallest buildings, lots of restaurants, and several shopping complexes, mostly underground.

AROUND OSAKA CASTLE Osaka Castle, which lies to the east, is the historic center of the city. It's in **Chuo-ku**, the Central Ward, which stretches through the city center.

MINAMI/NAMBA Four subway stops south of Umeda Station is Namba (also referred to as **Minami**, or South Osaka), with a cluster of stations serving subways, JR trains, and Kintetsu and Nankai lines, all of which are connected to one another via underground passageways. This is the heart of the city, bustling with the spirit of old Osaka, where you'll find more hotels, Osaka's liveliest eating and entertainment district centered on a narrow street called **Dotombori** (also written Dotonbori), and major shopping areas like the enclosed pedestrian streets **Shinsaibashi-Suji** and **America-Mura** with imported goods from America. Farther south is **Den Den Town**, Osaka's electronics district; and **Dogaya-suji**, famous for restaurant supplies. Connecting Kita-ku with Namba is Osaka's main street, **Midosuji Dori**, a wide boulevard lined with ginkgo trees and name-brand shops.

AROUND TENNOJI PARK At the south end of the JR Loop Line is **Tennoji-ku**, which was once a thriving temple town with **Shitennoji Temple** at its center. In addition to a park with a zoo, it boasts **Spa World**, Japan's biggest and most luxurious public bathhouse.

OSAKA BAY & PORT West of the city around Osaka Bay is where you will find **Universal Studios Japan** and Universal CityWalk shopping and dining complex; **Tempoan Harbour Village** with its first-class aquarium, shopping complex, and Suntory Museum; and domestic and international ferry terminals.

GETTING AROUND

Despite its size, I find Osaka easier to get around than other large Japanese cities because there are lots of signs and information in English. The exception is Osaka Station, used for JR trains, and its adjoining Umeda Station, used by subway lines and private railway lines Hankyu and Hanshin. Underground passages and shopping arcades complicate navigation; there's no escaping—you will get lost.

When exploring by foot, it helps to know that most roads running east and west end in "*dori*," while roads running north and south end in "*suji*," which means "avenue."

BY SUBWAY Osaka's user-friendly subway network is easy to use because all lines are color-coded and the station names are in English (even announcements are in English on many lines). The red **Midosuji Line** is the most important one for visitors; it passes through Shin-Osaka Station and on to Umeda (the subway station next to Osaka Station), Shinsaibashi, Namba, and Tennoji.

Fares begin at ¥200 (\$1.65) and increase according to the distance traveled. If you think you'll be traveling a lot by subway on a given day, consider purchasing a **One Day Pass** for ¥850 (\$7.10), which allows unlimited rides on subways and buses all day. On the 20th of each month (or on the following day if the 20th falls on a Sun or holiday) and every Friday, this pass costs just ¥600

Tips A Note on Directions

For all the attractions, accommodations, and restaurants listed below, I've included the nearest subway or JR station followed by the walking time to the establishment once you reach the indicated station (in parentheses).

(\$5) and offers slight discounts to several attractions. For trips outside Osaka, the **Surutto Kansai Card (Kansai Thru Pass)** allows you to ride subways and buses in Osaka, Kyoto, Nara, and Kobe, with a 2-day pass costing ¥3,800 (\$32) and a 3-day pass costing ¥5,000 (\$42). Children pay half price.

BY JR TRAIN A Japan Railways train called the Osaka Kanjo Line, or **JR Loop Line**, passes through Osaka Station and makes a loop around the central part of the city (similar to the Yamanote Line in Tokyo); take it to visit Osaka Castle. Fares begin at ¥120 (\$1).

SEEING THE SIGHTS NEAR OSAKA STATION

Floating Garden Observatory (Kuchu Teien Tenbodai) This futuristic observatory 167m (557 ft.) in the air looks like a space ship floating between the two towers of the Umeda Sky Building. Take the super-fast glass elevator from the East Tower building's third floor; you'll then take a glass-enclosed escalator that also bridges the two towers before depositing you on the 39th floor. I'm not afraid of heights, but taking an escalator over thin air in an earthquake-plagued nation certainly caught my attention; it made the "floating" observatory feel safe in comparison. From here, you have an unparalleled view of all Osaka, making it a popular nightspot for couples on dates. My own interest in the place, however, has waned ever since the female attendants stopped wearing cone head-shaped hats.

Umeda Sky Building, 1-1-88 Oyodo-naka, Kita-ku. ☎ **06/6440-3901**. www.skybldg.co.jp. Admission ¥700 (\$5.85) adults, ¥500 (\$4.15) junior-high and high-school students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Daily 10am-10:30pm. Station: JR Osaka or Umeda (Central North exit of JR Osaka Station, 9 min.).

Museum of Oriental Ceramics (Toyotoji Bijutsukan) ★★ *Finds* This modern facility, about a 15-minute walk south of Osaka Station on Nakanoshima Island in the Dojima River, is my favorite museum in Osaka. Indeed, its 2,700-piece collection of Chinese, Korean, and Japanese ceramics—of which 300 are on display at any one time on a rotating basis—ranks as one of the finest in the world. Built specifically for the collection, the museum does a superb job showcasing the exquisite pieces as the masterpieces they truly are, in darkened rooms that utilize natural light and computerized natural-light simulation. Korean celadon, Chinese ceramics from the Song and Ming dynasties, Arita ware from the Edo Period, and much more are on display. Even if you've never given ceramics more than a passing glance, you're likely to come away with a heightened sense of appreciation. You'll want to spend 30 minutes or more here.

1-1-26 Nakanoshima, Kita-ku. ☎ **06/6454-8600**. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) students, free for children. Tues-Sun 9:30am-5pm. Closed during exhibition changes. Station: Yodoyabashi or Kitahama (5 min.).

Sega Amusement Theme Park (Umeda Joypolis) ★ *Kids* I suppose it could be argued that you haven't experienced today's Japan unless you've visited at least one Joypolis, the reigning king of amusement arcades. This one, on the eighth and ninth floors of a shopping arcade complete with a Ferris wheel on top, overloads the senses with lots of flashing lights, bells and whistles, and throngs of squealing kids and teenagers. In addition to arcade games, virtual rides simulate gliding through the air or shooting the rapids of a wild river. **Note:** Children under the age of 16 aren't allowed here after 7pm and that some "rides" carry height restrictions, with rules enforced by what—the joy police?

HEP FIVE, Umeda Kita-ku. ☎ **06/6366-3647**. Free admission; attractions ¥500-¥600 (\$4.15-\$5). Daily 11am-11pm (you must enter by 10:15pm). Station: JR Osaka or Umeda (5 min.).

Fun Fact Built in Stone

Osaka Castle is famous for its stone fortifications, made with more than 500,000 granite stones. Five of these stones weigh more than 90,000 kilograms (100 tons), with the largest, nicknamed the Octopus Stone, measuring 11m (38 ft.) by 5m (18 ft.) and weighing 117,000 kilograms (130 tons).

AROUND OSAKA CASTLE

Osaka Castle (Osaka-jo) ★★ First built in the 1580s on the order of Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Osaka Castle was the largest castle in Japan, a magnificent structure used by Toyotomi as a military stronghold from which to wage war against rebellious feudal lords in far-flung provinces. By the time he died in 1598, Toyotomi had accomplished what no man had done before: crushed his enemies and unified all of Japan under his command.

After Toyotomi's death, Tokugawa Ieyasu seized power and established his shogunate government in Edo. But Toyotomi's heirs had ideas of their own: Considering Osaka Castle impregnable, they plotted to overthrow the Tokugawa government. In 1615, Tokugawa sent troops to Osaka where they not only annihilated the Toyotomi insurrectionists but destroyed Osaka Castle. The Tokugawas rebuilt the castle in 1629, but the main tower was destroyed by lightning 36 years later, and the rest burned in 1868 as the shogunate made their last stand against imperial forces and what later became known as the Meiji Restoration.

The present Osaka Castle dates from 1931 and was extensively renovated in 1997. Built of ferroconcrete, it's not as massive as the original but is still one of Japan's most famous castles and is impressive with its massive stone walls, black and gold-leaf trim, and copper roof. Its eight-story *donjon* (keep) rises 39m (130 ft.), with an observation platform on the top floor offering bird's-eye views of the city. The rest of the donjon houses a museum that uses videos, holograms, models, and artifacts to describe the life and times of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and the history of the castle. Unfortunately, most explanations are in Japanese only, but there's plenty to see, including a folding screen with scenes of the intense fighting that took place between Toyotomi and Tokugawa forces, samurai armor and gear, a full-scale reproduction of Toyotomi's Gold Tea Room, and a model of Osaka Castle during the Toyotomi Era. You'll probably spend about 45 minutes here.

1–1 Osakajo, Chuo-ku. ☎ **06/6941-3044**. www.tourism.city.jp/en/castle. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, free for children under 12. Daily 9am–5pm. Station: Osakajo-Koen on the JR Loop Line or Morinomiya (15 min.); or Temmabashi or Osaka Business Park (10 min.).

Osaka International Peace Center ★ Located on the southern edge of Osaka Castle Park, this museum strives for global peace by educating present and future generations about the horrors of war, related by those who survived it. Unlike other museums in Japan dedicated to peace—including those in Hiroshima and Nagasaki—this one does not shy away from Japan's role in the Asian conflict, including its war campaign in China, the abduction of Koreans to work in dangerous areas, and massacres committed by Japanese in Singapore, Malaysia, and elsewhere. But its main focus is on wartime death and destruction, with personal testimonies of air raid survivors (15,000 people died during World War II air raids on Osaka), displays centering on the suicide attacks by kamikaze pilots at the end of the war, graphic photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki after the atomic bombs were dropped, and a section devoted to the

horrors of the Auschwitz concentration camp. You'll probably spend 45 sobering minutes here.

2-1 Osakajo, Chuo-ku. ☎ **06/6947-7208**. Admission ¥250 (\$2.10) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) high-school students, free for children. Tues-Sun 9:30am-5pm. Closed on days following national holidays and last day of each month. Station: Morinomiyā (3 min.) or Osakajo-Koen (8 min.).

AROUND TENNOJI

Shitennoji Temple Founded 1,400 years ago as the first—and therefore oldest—officially established temple in Japan, Shitennoji Temple is the spiritual heart of Osaka. It was constructed in 593 by Prince Shotoku, who is credited with introducing Buddhism to Japan. However, like most wooden structures in Japan, its buildings have been destroyed repeatedly through the centuries by fire and war, including the 1615 Tokugawa raid on Osaka Castle, and World War II. And through the centuries, the buildings have been faithfully reconstructed exactly as they were in the 6th century, with the Main Gate, the five-story Buddhist Pagoda, the Main Golden Hall, and the Lecture Hall all on a north-south axis. Japanese flock to Shitennoji to pay respects to Prince Shotoku, who remains a revered, popular figure even today. There's also a turtle sanctuary. But the best thing to do here is wander the temple's newly restored Japanese landscape garden, first laid out during the Tokugawa regime and a lovely oasis with its manicured bushes, meandering streams, and waterfall.

Shitennoji 1-11-18, Tennoji-ku. ☎ **06/6771-0066**. Admission to either temple buildings or garden ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Temple grounds open 24 hr.; garden daily 10am-4pm. Station: Shitennoji-mae Yuhigaoka (exit 4, 5 min.); or JR Tennoji (north exit, 10 min.).

Spa World ★★ ★ This is the most luxurious and ambitious bathhouse I've ever seen. It can accommodate up to 5,000 people and draws upon hot springs brought up from 891m (2,970 ft.) below the earth's surface. On its roof, in a large hangarlike room, is a covered swimming complex that includes a pool, a slide, a wave pool, a sunning terrace, and a wading pool (rental bathing suits available). The rest of the large complex is divided into themed, geographical bathing zones, which are rotated between the sexes and include luxurious locker rooms. At the Asian Zone, for example, Middle Eastern music and tiled mosaics set the tone for the Turkish bath, while China is represented by a medicinal bath. Massage is also available. If you're timid about going to a public bath, this one will convert you. If you're already a fan, you'll want to move in—note, however, that at 5am you're charged for a new day. And sorry, people with tattoos—associated with the Japanese mafia—are not allowed.

3-2-24 Ebisu-higashi, Naniwa-ku. ☎ **06/6631-0001**. Admission weekdays ¥2,700 (\$23) adults, ¥1,500 (\$13) children; weekends and holidays ¥3,000 (\$25) adults, ¥1,700 (\$14) children. Daily 10am-9am. Station: Shin-Imamiya or Dobutsuenmae (2 min.). Next to festival gate.

OSAKA BAY AREA

Osaka's well-developed waterfront offers a quick getaway for Osakans wishing to escape urban life. In addition to shopping malls, an aquarium, and other attractions, it boasts **Universal Studios Japan**, one of Japan's major draws.

Osaka Aquarium (Kaiyukan) ★★ ★ *Kids* Of all the aquariums in Japan, this is probably my favorite. One of the world's largest—encompassing 26,570 sq. m (286,000 sq. ft.) and containing 2.9 million gallons of water—it's constructed around the theme "Ring of Fire," which refers to the volcanic perimeter encircling the Pacific Ocean. Tours begin with a video of erupting volcanoes followed by an escalator ride to the eighth floor; from there, you'll pass through 14 different habitats ranging from arctic to tropical as you follow a spiraling corridor

back to the ground floor, starting with the daylight world—a Japanese forest—above the ocean's surface and proceeding past Antarctica, Monterey Bay, the Great Barrier Reef, and other ecosystems as you travel to the depths of the ocean floor. The walls of the aquarium tank are constructed of huge acrylic glass sheets, making you feel like you're immersed in the ocean. You'll see 35,000 specimens representing 380 species; stars of the show include whale sharks (the largest fish in captivity), Antarctic penguins, the odd-looking ocean sunfish (which has the circumference of a truck tire but is as flat as a pancake), and the Japan giant spider crab with its incredible 3m (9.8-ft.) span. Allow about 1½ hours to tour the aquarium, avoiding weekends.

1–1–10 Kaigan-dori, Minato-ku. ☎ 06/6576-5501. Admission ¥2,000 (\$17) adults, ¥900 (\$7.50) children 7–15, ¥400 (\$3.35) children 4–6. Daily 10am–8pm. Closed sometimes in June and in winter. Station: Osakako (5 min.).

Suntory Museum ★ The Suntory Museum, which you can tour in about 30 minutes, is that fantastically modern-looking structure you see near the aquarium, designed by well-known architect Tadao Ando. It stages changing exhibitions in airy rooms against a dramatic background of the sea beyond its glass walls. Past exhibits have included posters by Toulouse-Lautrec, paintings by German expressionists, and glass by Emile Gallé; call or check the *Meet Osaka* quarterly for current information. There's also a 3-D IMAX theater with scenes so real you'll swear those fish on the screen are about to swim into your lap, a good museum shop, the Sky Lounge (perfect for taking a break), and a restaurant, Café Solare (p. 407).

1–5–10 Kaigan-dori, Minato-ku. ☎ 06/6577-0001. Admission to either museum or IMAX theater ¥1,000 (\$8.35) adults; ¥700 (\$5.85) seniors, high-school, and university students; ¥500 (\$4.15) children. Museum Tues–Sun 10:30am–7:30pm; IMAX Tues–Sun 11am–7pm (last show). Station: Osakako (5 min.).

Tips Mutineers Need Not Apply

The quickest—and most scenic—way to travel between Suntory Museum/aquarium and Universal Studios is via the **Captain Cook** shuttle boat (☎ 06/6573-8222), which departs every 30 minutes and charges ¥500 (\$4.15) for the 10-minute ride. A bonus: the boat ticket includes a ¥200 (\$1.65) discount for the aquarium.

Universal Studios Japan ★★ ★ Kids

Following the tradition of Universal's Hollywood and Orlando theme parks, USJ takes guests on a fantasy trip through the world of American blockbuster movies, with thrill rides, live entertainment, back-lot streets, restaurants, shops, and other attractions based on actual movies. Board a boat for a harrowing encounter with a great white straight out of *Jaws*, escape a T-Rex as you roller-coaster your way through a setting of *Jurassic Park*, watch a fantastic fire show at a *Backdraft* theater or a water extravaganza at

WaterWorld, take *E.T.* home to save his planet, and see, feel, and smell *Sesame Street* in 4-D (4-D in movie lingo apparently means there are smells and other sensations). Unfortunately, most of the attractions have been dubbed into Japanese (I wonder why the original English isn't available on audio guide), so it helps to know the movies beforehand. Plan for a whole day here, but note that it is immensely popular: Avoid weekends and arrive early, then head straight for your favorite rides for an Express Card, which will get you in at specific times so you avoid long lines.

2–1–33 Sakurajima, Konohana. ☎ 06/4790-7000. www.usj.co.jp. Studio Pass to all attractions ¥5,500 (\$46) adults, ¥4,800 (\$40) seniors, ¥3,700 (\$31) children 4–11. Open daily, generally 9am–7pm (to 9pm in peak season), but hours can vary with the seasons. Station: Universal City (5 min.).

IN NEARBY TAKARAZUKA

Northwest of Osaka, the town of Takarazuka is synonymous with the all-female **Takarazuka Troupe**. Founded in 1914 to attract vacationers to Takarazuka, the troupe proved instantly popular with the general public, whose taste turned from traditional Japanese drama to lively Western musicals and entertainment. Performances are held at the **Takarazuka Revue Hall** (☎ 0797/85-6770) most days throughout the year (closed Wed), usually at 1pm on weekdays and at 11am and 3pm on weekends and holidays. Tickets range from about ¥3,500 to ¥7,500 (\$29–\$63). For more information on the troupe, see the “Takarazuka Kagekidan” section on p. 214.

SHOPPING

Osaka is famous in Japan for shopping, in no small part because of the discerning nature of the Osakans themselves. Osaka, after all, developed as a commercial town of merchants—and who knows merchandise better than the merchants themselves?

Osaka must rank as one of the world's leading cities in underground shopping arcades. Enter the vast underground arcades in Umeda (where the JR, Hanshin, subway, and Hankyu train lines intersect) with names like **Whity Umeda**, **Hankyū Sanbangai**, **Diamor Osaka**, and **Dojima Underground Shopping Center**, and you may never emerge in this lifetime. **Crysta Nagahori**, connecting Nagahoribashi Station to Yotsubashi-suji, has a glass atrium ceiling, flowing streams of water, and 100 shops, making it one of the largest—if not the largest—shopping malls in Japan. Nearby are **Namba Walk**, **Nan-nan Town**, and **Namba City**, all interconnected by underground passageways.

There are plenty of aboveground shopping options as well. **Den Den Town** (station: Nipponbashi or Ebisucho) is Osaka's electronics shopping region (*Den* is short for “electric”), similar to Tokyo's Akihabara and just as good. Some 200 open-fronted shops here deal in electrical and electronic equipment, from rice cookers and refrigerators to CD players, calculators, cameras, and computers. Most stores here are open daily 10am to 8pm.

Running north to south and a few blocks east of Nankai Namba Station is **Sennichimae Doguya-suji**, a covered shopping lane with about 45 open-fronted shops selling all the pots, pans, dishes, and implements you'd ever need to prepare and serve Japanese food. Chopsticks, chopstick rests, pottery, lacquerware, frying pans, trays, kitchen knives, rice bowls, plastic food, and lots of gift ideas are here at very inexpensive prices—not surprising since Osaka is known as the food capital of Japan.

Midosuji Dori, a wide boulevard lined with ginkgo trees running north and south in the heart of the city, is the city's calling card for name-brand boutiques. Just to the east is **Shinsaibashi-suji**, a covered promenade with many long-established shops, some dating back to the Edo Period. On the other side of Midosuji Dori is **America-Mura**, a popular spot for young Japanese shopping for T-shirts, Hawaiian shirts, ripped jeans, and other American fashions at inflated prices; its biggest marketplace is **Big Step**. Teens also flock to **HEP FIVE**, a huge shopping complex near Umeda with a Joypolis amusement arcade and a Ferris wheel on top. **Universal CityWalk**, near Universal Studios, offers everything from Hello Kitty goods to Italian imports.

WHERE TO STAY

Most of Osaka's hotels are clustered around Osaka Station. In the listings below, the nearest subway or JR station is indicated followed by the number of minutes it takes to walk from the station to the hotel (in parentheses).

AROUND OSAKA & SHIN-OSAKA STATIONS

Very Expensive

The Ritz-Carlton, Osaka ★★ Opened in 1997, The Ritz-Carlton's first Japanese venture immediately gained a reputation as one of the nation's top hotels. Instead of the grandiose marble lobby most Japanese hotels seem to favor, the lobby here is small and intimate, done in old world style with overstuffed sofas, fireplaces, stunning flower arrangements, chandeliers, antiques, and landscape paintings and portraits from the 18th and 19th centuries. Hotel restaurants are all on the same lower floor to preserve the privacy of hotel guests. Unique standouts include The Bar with its single-malt whiskey, cigars, and live music nightly; an outdoor garden serving champagne in summer; afternoon tea served in the lobby lounge; and a health club free to hotel guests. Stylish rooms—located from the 24th through 37th floors and among the largest in the city—offer panoramic views, especially from deluxe corner rooms, as well as goose-down pillows and comforters; terry robes; and spacious marble bathrooms with magnifying mirrors, separate areas for the shower stall, tub, and toilet, and two sinks.

2-5-25 Umeda, Kita-ku, Osaka 530-0001. ☎ **800/241-3333** in the U.S. and Canada or 06/6343-7000. Fax 06/6343-7001. www.ritz-carlton.com. 292 units. ¥39,000 – ¥49,000 (\$325–\$408) single; ¥49,000 – ¥59,000 (\$408–\$492) twin or double. Club floors from ¥49,000 (\$408) single, ¥59,000 (\$492) double. ¥5,000 (\$42) extra on Sat and nights before holidays. AC, DC, MC, V. Station: Osaka, Umeda, or Nishi-Umeda (7 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Mediterranean, French seafood, Cantonese); 2 bars; lounge; state-of-the-art health club with gym, 25m (82-ft.) indoor lap pool, and indoor/outdoor whirlpools (free to hotel guests); spa with dry and wet saunas and baths (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35); concierge; small business center; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies on demand, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

Expensive

In addition to the choices listed below, consider the **Hilton Osaka**, 1-8-8 Umeda, Kita-ku, Osaka 530-0001 (☎ **800/HILTONS** or 06/6347-7111; fax 06/6347-7001; www.hilton.com), a well-established branch of the Hilton chain with a wide range of services and facilities, including an adjacent shopping and dining complex

Rihga Royal Hotel ★★ Osaka's oldest hotel, the Royal opened in 1935, expanded in 1973 and 1995, and is now part of the Rihga chain. Located on Nakanoshima, an island in the middle of the Dojima River in the heart of Osaka (less than a 10-min. ride from Osaka Station), it enjoys a good reputation among Japanese and a high occupancy rate on weekends, due in no small part to the convention center next door. It also boasts a friendly and helpful multilingual staff and offers a wide range of facilities, including a 60-store shopping arcade, a deli takeout counter with health-conscious choices, and—at the other end of the extreme—the best-stocked gourmet shop I've seen in a hotel, with 700 eye-popping pastries and delicacies. It is also blessed with one of my favorite lobby lounges in the city—a restful oasis where you can sip your drink, watch a cascading waterfall against a backdrop of cliffs and foliage, and be serenaded by piano music in the early evening. Comfortable guest rooms are nicely decorated in French drawing-room style, with large desks and other features that make them popular with business travelers. Of the hotel's many restaurants, most renowned is the Chambord, offering French cuisine and views from the 29th floor. In short, you could do much worse than this hotel despite the crowds, and a new subway line, due to open in 2008, is sure to clinch its rating as one of Osaka's most popular hotels.

5-3-68 Nakanoshima, Kita-ku, Osaka 530-0005. ☎ **06/6448-1121**. Fax 06/6448-4414. www.rihga.com. 987 units. ¥14,000 – ¥24,000 (\$117–\$200) single; ¥26,000 – ¥47,000 (\$200–\$392) double or twin. Presidential Towers executive floor from ¥32,000 (\$267) single, ¥35,000 (\$292) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Yodoyabashi, then free shuttle bus from exit 4 (turn left) with departures every 15 min.; or JR Osaka Station north exit, free shuttle every 6 min. **Amenities:** 16 restaurants; 4 bars; indoor circular “shape-up” pool, 25m (82-ft.) lap pool, Jacuzzi, and sauna (fee: ¥2,100/\$18); concierge; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Westin Osaka ★★ A convenient location next to the futuristic-looking Umeda Sky Building (with its Floating Garden Observatory), generously sized guest rooms with expansive city views, and a laid-back yet chic interior make this a top choice for business travelers and tourists alike. A sun-drenched lobby lounge with a three-story glass facade overlooking greenery and a dome bathed in lights that change color through the course of a day greet guests arriving from Osaka Station via the free shuttle. Guest rooms, which increase in price the higher they are, come with all you might expect, including shower stalls separated from tubs and, on higher floors, two basins instead of one. L-shaped corner rooms are especially good, with separate sleeping and lounging areas.

1-1-20 Oyodo Naka, Kita-ku, Osaka 531-0076. ☎ **800/WESTIN-1** in the U.S. and Canada or 06/6440-1111. Fax 06/6440-1100. www.westin-osaka.co.jp. 304 units. ¥28,000 – ¥37,000 (\$233–\$308) single; ¥34,000 – ¥43,000 (\$283–\$358) double or twin. Executive Club Floors ¥40,000 (\$333) single, ¥48,000 (\$400) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: JR Osaka, then free shuttle bus every 20 min.; or a 15-min. walk. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, Italian, coffee shop); bar; lounge; 20m (82-ft.) indoor lap pool, fitness room, and sauna (fee: ¥4,000/\$33); children's day-care center (¥5,000/\$42 for 2 hr.); concierge; tour desk; salon; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Moderate

Hotel Granvia Osaka *Kids* You can't get any closer to Osaka Station than this hotel, with discounts for holders of Japan Rail Passes making it even more attractive for train travelers. But there are prices to pay: a lobby that's hard to find in the maze that is Osaka Station, and elevators that are crowded with hungry masses on their way to the hotel's many 19th-floor restaurants. Guest rooms, on floors 22 to 26, are cramped but clean. Families may want to opt for one of the “Corner Family” rooms, larger “Pretty Family” rooms, or largest “Excellent Family” rooms, which cost ¥47,000 (\$392), ¥54,000 (\$500), and ¥80,000 (\$667) respectively for a family of four. The hotel provides direct access to the Daimaru department store in the basement.

3-1-1 Umeda, Kita-ku, Osaka 530-0001. ☎ **06/6344-1235**. Fax 06/6344-1130. 644 units. ¥13,500 – ¥17,500 (\$113–\$146) single; ¥21,500 – ¥32,000 (\$179–\$267) double; ¥21,500 – ¥37,000 (\$179–\$308) twin. Discounts available for holders of Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Osaka or Umeda (1 min.; above the station). **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; bar; 2 lounges; salon; 24-hr. room service; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Hotel Laforet Shin-Osaka I can't think of any reason to stay near Shin-Osaka Station except for the sheer convenience of nearby bullet trains, since there are no attractions there and the rest of Osaka is just a short subway ride away. If you're unconvinced, this modern hotel is your best bet, just a minute's walk from the station and offering comfortable rooms with contemporary decor. Deluxe rooms are swankier, with massage chairs and round desks.

1-2-70 Miyahara, Yodogawa-ku, Osaka 532-0003. ☎ **06/6350-4444**. Fax 06/6350-4460. www.laforet.co.jp/sinosaka. 332 units. ¥17,000 – ¥20,000 (\$142–\$167) single; ¥20,000 – ¥26,000 (\$167–\$217) twin or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shin-Osaka (1 min.); take the west exit and turn right. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants

(coffee shop, teppanyaki); bar; room service (7am–11pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

Rihga Grand Hotel ★ This is a fine small hotel on the island of Nakanoshima in the heart of Osaka, about a 12-minute walk from Osaka Station. Its location, next to Osaka's Festival Hall, makes it a favorite among concertgoers and musicians, though business travelers favor it as well. Dating from 1960, it's also one of Osaka's older hotels, and it has aged gracefully. Rooms, with contemporary furnishings, include very small singles with no closets, though the standard doubles and twins are of average size for its price category. Deluxe rooms add love seats and vanities. I prefer rooms that face the river—although there's little boat traffic and nothing really to see, the view helps convey a sense of spaciousness.

2–3–18 Nakanoshima, Kita-ku, Osaka 530-0005. ☎ 06/6202-1212. Fax 06/6227-5054. www.rihga.com. 310 units. ¥12,000–¥15,000 (\$100–\$125) single; ¥22,000–¥28,000 (\$183–\$233) double; ¥24,000–¥30,000 (\$200–\$250) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Higobashi (3 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Western, buffet, coffee shop); bar; lounge; barbershop; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

Inexpensive

Family Inn Fifty's Edobori ★ *Value* When Family Inn Fifty's opened in Tokyo in 2000, I predicted it was a chain in the making. This second Fifty's, south of Nakanoshima island, opened in 2002 and offers the same low prices, clean but small rooms outfitted with double bed, sofa bed, wall-mounted TV, and tiled bathroom (but no closet), as well as automated check-in. Smokers pay ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra; you even pay extra for toothbrushes and slippers here. The catch is that the place is a bit of a chore to reach from Osaka Station (you have to change subway lines), but once you're settled, you'll find its location fine.

2–6–18 Edobori, Nishi-ku, Osaka 550-0002. ☎ 06/6225-2636. www.fiftys.com. 99 units. ¥5,000 (\$42) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) double; ¥9,000 (\$75) triple. Rates include continental breakfast. MC, V. Station: Azawa (exit 1, 5 min.). **Amenities:** Coffee shop; free use of computers with Internet access; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV.

Hotel II Monte ★★ *Finds* Open since 1997, this smart-looking hotel has a convenient location that brings in both business and leisure travelers and is my top choice for budget accommodations near the station. A small reception on the third floor has a helpful staff. Breakfast is the only meal available, and coffee in the lobby is free to guests. Rooms are simple but modern and come with desk, 200-channel music system, and ample counter space in the bathrooms.

7–13 Doyama-cho, Kita-ku, Osaka 530-0027. ☎ 06/6361-2828. Fax 06/6361-3525. 122 units. ¥7,700 (\$64) single; ¥11,000 (\$92) double; ¥13,000–¥18,000 (\$150) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Osaka, Umeda, or Higasahi Umeda (10 min.). East of Osaka Station on Shin-Midosuji Ave. beside the Hankyu-Higashi Dori shopping street. **Amenities:** Same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

AROUND OSAKA CASTLE

Expensive

New Otani Osaka ★★ ★ In a business park that's home to corporate headquarters for KDD, NEC, Sumitomo, and other big companies, this Leading Hotel of the World member attracts both business and tourist clientele. Its proximity to Osaka Castle Park, popular with joggers, families, and young Japanese, and its varied public facilities, ranging from a multitude of restaurants to a fitness club (free to hotel guests in the morning), give the property something of an "urban resort" atmosphere. Everything about the hotel's public spaces is visually

pleasing, from the airy, four-story atrium lobby with a sunken lounge in its center to the indoor pool with its glass-vaulted ceiling. Rooms, however, are rather standard, with rates based on size, height, and view. The best rooms provide the city's most dramatic views of Osaka Castle, which is lit at night, but at fairly hefty prices. Service throughout the hotel is first class.

1-4-1 Shiromi, Chuo-ku, Osaka 540-8578. ☎ 800/223-6800 in the U.S. and Canada or 06/6941-1111. Fax 06/6941-9769. www.newotani.co.jp/en. 540 units. ¥30,000–¥47,000 (\$250–\$392) single; ¥34,000–¥51,000 (\$283–\$425) twin or double. ¥4,000 extra Sat and nights before holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: JR Loop Line to Osakajo-Koen (3 min.) or Osaka Business Park Station (3 min.). Across the moat from Osaka Castle. **Amenities:** 12 restaurants; 2 bars; lounge; fitness club with indoor and outdoor pools and sauna (fee: ¥2,500/\$21; fitness room and indoor pool free 7–10am); 2 outdoor tennis courts; children's day-care center (¥5,000/\$42 for 2 hr.); concierge; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade; salon; room service (6am–1am); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies on demand, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

NAMBA & SHINSAIBASHI

Expensive

Hotel Nikko Osaka ★★ A curious lack of accommodations in the heart of the city makes this the only player in its price range. A white monolith soaring 32 stories aboveground (and with four stories of shopping and parking underground), it has a great location above a subway station and is right on Osaka's most fashionable boulevard, Midosuji Dori, making its lobby lounge a popular spot for locals meeting friends. In fact, location is mainly what you're paying for here: There is no health club, and guests are overwhelmingly business travelers. Rooms are small but pleasing, and since there are no high buildings to obstruct views, city panoramas are a plus from most floors. Still, you'll pay more for rooms on higher floors and for more space. This is a good choice if you want to be in the midst of Osaka's shopping and nightlife.

1-3-3 Nishi-Shinsaibashi, Chuo-ku, Osaka 542-0086. ☎ 06/6244-1111. Fax 06/6245-2432. www.hno.co.jp. 640 units. ¥18,500–¥20,500 (\$154–\$171) single; ¥28,500–¥38,000 (\$238–\$317) double; ¥28,500–¥33,500 (\$238–\$279) twin; Nikko executive floors ¥54,000–¥57,000 (\$450–\$475) double, ¥54,000 (\$450) twin. ¥1,000 (\$8) extra per person Sat and nights before holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shinsaibashi (exit 8 underneath the hotel, 1 min.). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; bar; 2 lounges; concierge; large underground shopping arcade; salon; room service (7am–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Moderate

Hotel Metro The 21 *Value* Opened in 1997, this hotel has a great location for night owls, just a few minutes' walk from Dotombori, Osaka's main nightlife district. Its mostly single rooms, along with 100 twins and doubles, are very small but clean and modern, with higher rates charged for higher floors. There's also a ladies' floor for extra security, decorated with a more feminine touch and adding women's toiletries. Stock your empty fridge with purchases from the ground-floor 7-Eleven.

2-13 Soemon-cho, Chuo-ku, Osaka 542-0084. ☎ 06/6211-3555. Fax 06/6211-3586. 339 units. ¥8,000–¥9,500 (\$67–\$79) single; ¥12,000–¥18,000 (\$100–\$150) double; ¥14,000–¥20,000 (\$117–\$167) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Nipponbashi (exit 2, 5 min.); cross Dotombori canal and turn left. Or Namba (exit 14, 10 min.); cross Dotombori Canal and turn right. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Chinese, Western); bar; convenience store, room service (9am–1am), same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service, nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Inexpensive

Toyoko Inn Osaka Namba ★ *Value* This chain is smart to offer perks that set it apart from other business hotels, including computers with free Internet access in the lobby, free Japanese breakfasts, free telephone calls within Japan

from the lobby phone, semi-double-size beds in the mostly single rooms, and nonsmoking rooms. Of course, at these rates, you can't expect accommodations much larger than shoeboxes. There are no views to speak of, though those rooms facing Yasaka Jinja shrine are quieter.

2-8-7 Motomachi, Naniwa-ku, Osaka 556-0016. ☎ **06/4397-1045**. Fax 06/4397-1046. www.toyoko-inn.com. 143 units. ¥6,200 (\$52) single; ¥7,200 (\$60) double; ¥8,200 (\$68) twin. Rates include free Japanese breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Namba on the Midotsuji Line (exit 5, 4 min.) or Namba of the JR and Kintetsu lines (10 min.). On Yotsubashisuji Dori Ave. **Amenities:** Free Internet access in lobby computers; coin-op washers and dryers; laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

ELSEWHERE IN THE CITY

Expensive

Imperial Hotel Osaka (Teikoku Hotel) ★★ Although a bit off the beaten track, this luxury hotel's location on the cherry tree-lined Okawa River is great for jogging and imparts a relaxing, resortlike setting despite the adjoining OAP, a large office building that attracts business travelers but also contains shops and restaurants. Like its Tokyo namesake, its bold interior designs show the same Frank Lloyd Wright inspirations, including an Old Imperial Bar that pays homage to the American architect, and it goes without saying that this Osaka property offers the same fine service as the famed Tokyo Imperial. The high-ceilinged guest rooms offer large windows with remote-control drapes (request a room facing the river), aromatherapy cosmetics, magnifying mirrors, generous well-lit closets, and marble bathrooms.

1-8-50 Temmabashi, Kita-ku Osaka 530-0042. ☎ **800/223-6800** in the U.S. and Canada or 06/6881-1111. Fax 06/6881-1200. 390 units. www.imperialhotel.co.jp. ¥27,000–¥36,000 (\$225–\$300) single; ¥32,000–¥41,000 (\$267–\$342) double or twin; Imperial executive floor from ¥31,000 (\$258) single, ¥36,000 (\$300) double. ¥2,000–¥3,000 (\$17–\$25) more Sat and nights before holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: JR Sakuranomiya west exit (5 min.); or Osaka Station north exit, free shuttle every 20 min. (more on weekends). **Amenities:** 6 restaurants; bar; 2 lounges; golf driving range (¥5,000/\$42); Osaka's largest state-of-the-art health club with 3 lit outdoor tennis courts, 25m (82-ft.) indoor pool, spa, Jacuzzi, and sauna (fee: ¥2,000/\$17 morning, ¥5,000/\$42 afternoon); children's day-care center; concierge; business center; shopping arcade; salon; barbershop; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms; medical clinic; free bicycles (the castle is a 10-min. ride away). *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, fax, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

Moderate

Hotel International House Osaka *Value* ★ The International House is a modern facility used for international seminars, conventions, and meetings. It includes this hotel, used mainly by those attending seminars but also open to the public—try to book well in advance. Rooms are spartan with about as much personality as those in a business hotel, but they have everything you need, including tiny tiled bathrooms, yukata, and a small desk. Some 40 of the 52 rooms are singles, making this a great choice for the single traveler, but note that they don't have closets and are fairly small. The twins, however, are of adequate size. Note that there's a midnight curfew.

8-2-6 Uehommachi, Tennoji-ku, Osaka 543-0001. ☎ **06/6773-8181**. Fax 06/6773-0777. 52 units. ¥6,500 (\$54) single; ¥12,000 (\$100) twin; ¥15,000 (\$125) triple. Rates include continental breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Uehommachi on the Kintetsu Line (5 min.); or the Tanimachi 9-chome (8 min.) or Shitennoji-mae subway station (5 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Western, coffee shop); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

There's a saying among Japanese that whereas a Kyotoite will spend his last yen on a fine kimono, an Osakan will spend it on food. You don't have to spend a

lot of money, however, to enjoy good food in Osaka. Local specialties include **Oshi-zushi** (pressed square-shaped sushi), **udon** noodles with white soy sauce, and **takoyaki** (wheat-flour dumplings with octopus).

Osaka is probably best-known, however, for **okonomiyaki**, which literally means “as you like it.” Its origins date from about 1700, when a type of thin flour pancake cooked on a hot plate and filled with miso paste was served during Buddhist ceremonies. It wasn’t until this century that it became popular, primarily during food shortages, and gradually, other ingredients such as pork, egg, and cabbage were added. Today, Osaka is literally riddled with inexpensive okonomiyaki restaurants—more than 4,000 of them.

AROUND OSAKA STATION

Very Expensive

La Baie ★★ FRENCH KAISEKI It’s easy to pretend you’re the honored guest in a nobleman’s house when dining at the Ritz-Carlton’s premier restaurant, decorated in elegant drawing-room style with a fireplace, landscape paintings, still lifes, and other objets d’art. The menu of fresh seafood and seasonal dishes is French, but dishes are presented kaiseki style, as is the rage these days. If the sautéed turbot flavored with thyme and accompanied by eggplant ravioli or the chocolate-flavored pigeon breast with nuts served with cauliflower puree and pepper butter sauce don’t fit into your budget, come for the set lunch, which gives choices of appetizers and main dishes, along with recommended wines. Weekdays, there’s even a special ladies’ lunch for ¥3,500 (\$29). In any case, make a reservation: Many consider this to be Osaka’s finest restaurant.

Ritz-Carlton, 5th floor, 2–5–25 Umeda. ☎ 06/6343-7000. Reservations required. Main dishes ¥3,900–¥6,000 (\$33–\$50); set dinner ¥12,000–¥22,500 (\$100–\$188); set lunch ¥5,500–¥9,500 (\$46–\$79). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–9:30pm. Station: Osaka, Umeda, or Nishi-Umeda (7 min.).

Expensive

⁽¹³⁴⁾ **Kaen** ★★★ FRENCH KAISEKI This refined, modern restaurant, with seating for only 32 lucky diners, serves set meals which change once a month (it also has an a la carte menu, but it’s in Japanese only). The food is French, but each course is served in the kaiseki manner: separately, using Japanese plates and dishes, and eaten with chopsticks instead of forks. Each plate is chosen to enhance the food according to color, texture, and the seasons. This restaurant has been around a long time—long before fusion dining became the rage—and it’s still highly recommended.

Steak Ron Building, 3rd floor, 1–10–2 Sonnezaki-shinchi. ☎ 06/6344-2929. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥4,500–¥15,000 (\$38–\$125); set lunch ¥2,500–¥5,000 (\$21–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm (last order). Station: JR Kitashinchi (1 min.) or Nishi-Umeda (5 min.). South of Osaka Station across from the Ekimae Dai-Ni (Dai-2) Building.

Moderate

Enoteca ★ CONTINENTAL Shelves filled with wine bottles line the walls of this upscale shop, in the back of which is a casual restaurant specializing in meals that complement our favorite form of the grape. The relaxed ambience and reasonably priced food drew us in (okay, so the wine had something to do with it), but what better way to imbibe a celebratory glass or two than with selections of cheese, smoked salmon, a classic *croque monsieur*, or the day’s lunch? The menu is limited, but the fun part is selecting a bottle of wine from the shop (corkage fee is ¥500/\$4.15; waived on Mon) to accompany your meal. Herbis, 2nd floor, 2–5–25 Umeda. ☎ 06/6343-7175. Main dishes ¥700–¥1,000 (\$5.85–\$8.35); set lunch ¥1,000 (\$8.35). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9:30pm (last order). Station: Nishi-Umeda (3 min.). South of Osaka Station in the Herbis complex adjacent to The Ritz-Carlton.

Inexpensive

In addition to the choices here, a fun place for a meal is **Takimikoji Village**, located in the basement of the same building as the Floating Garden Observatory (p. 393). It's a re-created Showa-Era 1920s and 1930s Japanese village, boasting everything from an old-fashioned sweets shop and a barbershop to a post office and a miniature shrine. There are about a dozen restaurants here—branches of well-known Osaka establishments—serving *okonomiyaki*, *kushikatsu*, *teppanyaki*, noodles, *yakitori*, and more. Most lunches cost less than ¥1,000 (\$8.35) and dinners less than ¥2,000 (\$17), making it very popular with those who work in the area. It's open daily, with lunch served from about 11:30am to 2pm and dinner from 5 to 10:30pm.

Capricciosa *Kids* PIZZA/PASTA This chain restaurant is very popular with students and families for its pizza and pasta, available in regular size (good for one person) or large size for hearty appetites or two diners. The English-language menu lists everything from pizza *capricciosa* (with bacon, salami, onion, and more) to spaghetti with eggplant and spinach in meat sauce. The salads are big enough for two to share. However, the cheesy decor and fake plants just don't do it for me. On the other hand, a walk through Yodobashi Camera shop with its endless stock is a trip.

In addition to this one near Osaka Station, other convenient locations are in the America Mura shopping district, 2–12–22 Nishi Shinsaibashi (☎ 06/6212-4371; station: Shinsaibashi), open daily 11:30am to 10pm; and in the Namba Oriental Hotel Building, 2–8–17 Sennichimae (☎ 06/6644-8330; station: Midosuji), open daily 11am to 10:30pm.

Yodobashi Camera, 8th floor, 1–1 Obukacho. ☎ 06/6488-2271. Pizza and pasta ¥790 – ¥890 (\$6.60–\$7.40) for small sizes, ¥1,360 – ¥1,700 (\$11–\$14) for large sizes. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Station: JR Osaka or Umeda (1 min.). Just north of the station.

135 Okonomiyaki Madonna OKONOMIYAKI At this modern *okonomiyaki* restaurant with a young and friendly staff, ingredients change with the seasons but may include pork, beef, squid, octopus, shrimp, potato, mushroom, or oyster. Fried noodles are also available. Single diners will feel comfortable at this very casual establishment, sitting around a counter watching food being prepared.

Hilton Plaza, 2nd basement, 1–8–8 Umeda. ☎ 06/6347-7371. Set meal ¥1,200 – ¥2,800 (\$10–\$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9:30pm (last order). Station: Umeda or Nishi-Umeda (2 min.), Osaka (4 min.). In the basement of Hilton Plaza (next to the Osaka Hilton hotel).

AROUND OSAKA CASTLE

Moderate

Trader Vic's INTERNATIONAL This is a great lunch choice for Osaka Castle sightseers. Decorated in Polynesian style typical of Trader Vic's branches around the world, it offers dining with a view of the castle, the park, and the river. There's a lunch special (served Mon–Sat until 2:45pm) for ¥1,500 (\$13), as well as a la carte lunch selections that include hamburgers, club sandwiches, pasta, and other international fare. Or come for the Sunday champagne brunch (served 11:30am–2:45pm), when for ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra you can drink unlimited sparkling wine. Dinners offer a wider, and more expensive, selection, including salads, a good range of vegetable side dishes, curries, steaks, seafood, barbecued chicken, and Chinese dishes. There's also an extensive cocktail menu.

New Otani Hotel, 1–4 Shiromi. ☎ 06/6949-3210. Main dinner courses ¥2,000 – ¥10,500 (\$17–\$88); set lunch ¥1,500 – ¥3,500 (\$13–\$29); Sun brunch ¥3,500 (\$29) adults, ¥2,000 (\$17) children 7–12, ¥1,000

(\$8.35) children 3–6. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–11:15pm. Station: Osakajo-Koen on the JR Loop Line or Osaka Business Park Station (3 min.).

Inexpensive

Panorama Beer Restaurant Asahi  **VARIED WESTERN** Views and the beer are the best reasons to pay a visit to this Asahi beer hall, which does provide panoramic city views but none of the castle. Popular with area office workers, it offers pizza, pasta, beefsteak, grilled sausage, and rather mundane choices from an English-language menu. The set lunches are a bargain and come with salad, rice, vegetables, and all-you-can-drink tea, coffee, or juice. Or, come for a snack and wash it down with a mug or two of Asahi beer.

IMP Building, 26th floor, 1–3–7 Shiromi Chuo-ku. ☎ **06/6946-2595**. Main dishes ¥900–¥1,500 (\$7.50–\$13); set lunch ¥850–¥1,000 (\$7.10–\$8.35). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 4:30–10pm. Subway: Osaka Business Park (1 min.). JR train: Osakajo-Koen (4 min.). In Osaka Business Park, across from the New Otani Hotel.

NAMBA

Dotombori (or Dotonbori), a narrow pedestrian lane just off Midosuji Dori that flanks the south bank of the Dotonbori Canal, is the center of Osaka's most famous nightlife district, which radiates from Dotombori on both sides of the canal; you'll find lots of restaurants and bars in this area.

Moderate

 **Kani Doraku** **CRAB** Specializing in *kani* (crab), this restaurant is difficult to miss—it has a huge model crab on its facade, moving its legs and claws. Part of a chain originating in Osaka a couple of decades ago, this is the main shop of more than 50 locations throughout Japan, including another one just down the street at 1–6–2 Dotonbori (☎ **06/6211-1633**). Dishes range from crab-suki, crab-chiri (a kind of crab sukiyaki), and fried crab dishes to crab croquette, roasted crab with salt, crab salad, crab sushi, and boiled king crab. The easiest thing to do, however, is to order a set meal from the display case outside or from the menu with its photos. This main location occupies several floors, with some tables offering a view of the water.

1–6–18 Dotonbori. ☎ **06/6211-8975**. Set dinner ¥4,800–¥10,000 (\$40–\$83); set lunch ¥1,800–¥2,200 (\$15–\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm. Station: Namba (exit 14, 2 min.). On Dotombori beside the Ebisu-bashi Bridge.

Inexpensive

 **Bar Tachibana** **TOFU/VARIED JAPANESE** Whether you are sightseeing in Dotombori or viewing Kabuki, this restaurant, in a lovely, typical Japanese setting in the basement of the Shochikuza Theatre, is a good pick. A microbrewery (¥380/\$3.15 for a glass of light or dark beer), Tachibana specializes in tofu, and most of the set meals include a dish of tofu. There's no English-language menu, but a changing daily lunch or the tempura teishoku are affordable and delicious. You can see famous Kabuki actors dining here, but how could you recognize them without their make-up?

Osaka Shochikuza Theater, 2nd basement, 1–9–19 Dotomburi. ☎ **06/6212-6074**. Main dishes ¥480–¥1,300 (\$4–\$11); set dinner ¥2,300–¥5,300 (\$19–\$44); set lunch ¥1,050–¥2,500 (\$8.75–\$21). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm. Station: Namba (exit 14, 2 min.). Look for its improbable entrance, on Dotombori near the bridge.

Cui-daore   **Kids** **VARIED JAPANESE** Cui-daore is famous for its clown model outside the front door, which began beating a drum and wiggling its eyebrows shortly after the place first opened in 1950. The restaurant's name means to “eat your way to bankruptcy” in reference to the Osakan joy of eating, but a

look at the prices in the extensive plastic-food display case shows you can dine very reasonably here on a great variety of food ranging from tempura and yakitori to sushi, shabu-shabu, kaiseki, and even Western food. What's more, the restaurant is very user-friendly; items in the display cases are identified in English and by number for easy ordering, and there's also an English-language menu.

Altogether, there are eight floors of dining, and prices increase the higher you go. On the ground floor is a modern, family-style dining area, serving everything from chicken curry and rice to a mixed seafood set. If you want to try Osaka's version of sushi, try the ¥1,000 (\$8.35) combo. From the clown outside to the food inside, this is a great place to bring youngsters; a child's set meal (¥800/\$6.65) includes a pair of black glasses just like the clown's. On the second floor is an *izakaya*, or Japanese-style pub, open from 4pm, where you can order a beer, yakitori, and snacks. In winter, the third floor serves *nabe* (one-pot stews) in a quiet and comfortable setting, while the top floors have sukiyaki, shabu-shabu, and kaiseki meals that change monthly (kaiseki courses begin at ¥4,000/\$33).

1–8–25 Dotonbori. ☎ 06/6211-5300. Set meals ¥650–¥5,000 (\$5.40–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Station: Namba (exit 14, 2 min.).

(138) Fugetsu OKONOMIYAKI Big Step is the biggest shopping complex in America-Mura, young Osakans' favorite place to shop for American clothing. As such, this branch of a famous okonomiyaki restaurant appeals to young diners with its hip, modern interior, pop music, and individual booths for dining. I recommend the squid, octopus, and pork *yakisoba* (fried noodles) or the *butatama*, an okonomiyaki with pork and egg.

Big Step, 3rd floor, 1–6–14 Nishi Shinsaibashi. ☎ 06/6258-5189. Okonomiyaki ¥550–¥950 (\$4.60–\$7.90); yakisoba ¥580–¥1,100 (\$4.85–\$9.15). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–9:30pm (last order). Station: Shinsaibashi (2 min.).

La Bamba del Rio MEXICAN Good for a quick fix if you're craving Mexican food, this tiny restaurant decorated in hot pink and bright colors offers all the classics, from enchiladas to burritos, tostadas, and tacos. A basket of small chips and sauce arrive at your table free if you order food and show them this book. Strawberry margaritas, anyone?

2–3–23 Dotonbori. ☎ 06/6213-9612. Main dishes ¥1,000–¥1,600 (\$8.35–\$13). AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 4pm–midnight. Station: Namba (5 min.). On the west end of Dotonbori (west of Midosuji Dori) just past the Dotonbori Hotel.

Namaste 🌶️🌶️ **INDIAN** This is a good place for hot and spicy Indian food, including tandoori and chicken, mutton, prawn, fish, and vegetable curries. The owner, who will wait on you, is so friendly and happy, you might think he's reached nirvana. You can reach yours by telling him how hot to make your food. The set lunches are a particularly great deal.

Rose Building, 3–7–28 Minami Semba. ☎ 06/6241-6515. Main dishes ¥700–¥1,500 (\$5.85–\$13); set dinner ¥1,900–¥4,300 (\$16–\$36); set lunch ¥750–¥1,800 (\$6.25–\$15). 10% discount for Frommer's readers. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 5:30–11pm. Station: Shinsaibashi (exit 1, 3 min.). 3 blocks north of the Sony Tower Building; from Midosuji Dori, turn east (right) at the Rolex shop and walk past the Shinsaibashi-Suji covered pedestrian shopping street; it will be on the right.

OSAKA BAY AREA

In addition to the choices below, Universal CityWalk has lots of restaurants, most of which are open daily from 11am to 10pm, including **Bubba Gump's** (☎ 06/4804-3880) for shrimp and **Hard Rock Cafe** (☎ 06/4804-3870) with its T-shirts for sale and a menu of burgers, steaks, sandwiches, and barbecued ribs.

Inexpensive

Café Solare PASTA This casual, airy, and down-to-earth restaurant, with some tables offering a view of the harbor, is convenient if you're visiting the Suntory Museum or nearby Osaka Aquarium (you don't have to buy museum admission to eat here). The pasta is freshly made, and there are also salads, soups, and other items at the self-service counter. After eating, you might want to retire to the museum's ninth-floor Sky Lounge (open Tues–Sun 11:30am–9pm), offering cocktails and other drinks, a limited menu and daily set lunches, and views of the harbor and port.

Suntory Museum, Tempozan Harbour Village, 1–5–10 Kaigandori. ☎ 06/6577-0009. Main dishes ¥700 – ¥1,000 (\$5.85–\$8.35). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–9pm. Closed when the museum is closed. Station: Osakako (5 min.).

Wolfgang Puck Café The menu at this casual restaurant with an upbeat, contemporary decor could be a lifesaver to those craving imaginative interpretations of East-meets-West cuisine. Start with an appetizer like grilled curry-marinated beef skewers with cucumber salad and Thai peanut cilantro sauce, followed by a designer pizza, California-style sushi, or coriander-crusted ahi tuna. Many dishes come in both small and large sizes. After a day spent at the imported Universal Studios, what better way to top it off than with a meal here?

Universal CityWalk, 6–2–61 Shimaya, Konohana-ku. ☎ 06/6465-76700. Small dishes ¥680 – ¥1,600 (\$5.65–\$13); large dishes ¥1,400 – ¥3,000 (\$12–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Station: Universal City (3 min.).

OSAKA AFTER DARK PERFORMING ARTS

BUNRAKU The **National Bunraku Theater**, 1–12–10 Nipponbashi, Chuo-ku (☎ 06/6212-2531 for information, 06/6212-1122 for reservations), was completed in 1984 as the only theater in Japan dedicated to Japanese traditional puppet theater. Productions are staged five times a year, with most productions running for 2 to 3 weeks at a time and held daily at 11am for Part 1 and at 4pm for Part 2. When Bunraku is not being performed, other traditional performing arts are often shown, including classical Japanese music. English programs are available. To find out whether a performance is being held, check *Meet Osaka* or contact one of the visitor information centers (see “Essentials,” on p. 387). Tickets usually run ¥2,300 to ¥5,800 (\$19–\$48). The National Bunraku Theater is located east of Namba and the Dotombori entertainment district, a 1-minute walk from exit 7 of Nipponbashi Station.

KABUKI The **Osaka Shochikuza**, 1–9–19 Dotombori, Chuo-ku (☎ 06/6214-2211), was built more than 50 years ago but was remodeled in 1997 as part of a revival of interest in Kabuki. Traditional kabuki is performed in January, July, and some other months of the year (the schedule changes yearly), and performances start usually at 11am and 4:30pm, with tickets averaging ¥4,200 (\$35). Performance information is also listed in *Meet Osaka*. The theater is located on Dotombori, just west of the Ebisu-bashi Bridge.

THE BAR SCENE

Osaka's liveliest—and most economical—nightlife district radiates from a narrow pedestrian lane called **Dotombori** (or Dotonbori), which flanks the south bank of the Dotonbori Canal. About a 2-minute walk from exit 14 of Namba Station or less than a 10-minute walk from Shinsaibashi Station, it's lined with restaurants and drinking establishments and is good for a lively evening stroll even if you don't wish to stop anywhere.

Bar Isn't It? Part of a chain, Bar Isn't It? employs a *gaijin* (foreign) staff and attracts a mainly young Japanese clientele with its low prices—all food and drinks cost ¥500 (\$4.15). No money is wasted on decor, and seating is at bar stools around dozens of high tables, but after midnight, it's standing room only. Live DJ sounds range from reggae to rock, and although there's no cover charge per se, on weekends there's a door charge of ¥1,000 (\$8.35), which includes two drink tickets on Friday and one drink ticket on Saturday, apparently to keep out those who want to join in the fun but don't want to drink. Daily 6pm to 2am, Friday to Saturday to 5am. There's another Bar Isn't It? east of Shinsaibashi Station on the street that runs along the north side of Daimaru department store, at 1–4–31 Shin-saibashi-Suji (☎ 06/6120-3861), open the same hours and also with the same door charge on weekends. Kakusho Building, 5th floor, 7–7 Doyamacho. ☎ 06/6363-4001. Station: Osaka, Umeda, or Higashi Umeda (10 min.). On the 5th floor above Shakey's, east of Osaka Station on Shin-Midosuji Ave. beside the Hankyu-Higashi Dori shopping street.

Christon Cafe A clone of Christon Cafe in Tokyo, this cafe uses Christianity as its decorating theme, with religious statues, stained-glass windows, and a high vaulted ceiling to evoke a churchlike setting. Some Japanese even choose it as their wedding venue. Daily 11:30am to 11:30pm. Opaque Osaka Building, 6th floor, 2–5 Shinsaibashi. ☎ 06/6213-2516. Subway: Namba (exit 14, 3 min.). Just north of the Ebisu-bashi bridge, on the left side of the Shinsaibashi-suji covered arcade.

Murphy's Of Osaka's several Irish pubs, this is probably the most popular (and our favorite), drawing a mixed crowd of both Japanese and foreigners and offering live Irish music most Wednesdays. Fish and chips or shepherd's pie are reasonable and surprisingly good, but you can also make a meal of the Guinness or Killkenny Ale. Monday through Thursday 5pm to 1am; Friday to Saturday 5pm to about 3am. Lead Plaza Building, 6th floor, 1–6–31 Higashi Shinsaibashi. ☎ 06/6282-0677. Station: Nagahoribashi (1 min.) or Shinsaibashi (4 min.). On Suzuki St. (1 block north of Europa Dori/Shimizu Dori), the road to the south of the Daimaru department store, several blocks east of the Shinsaibashi-suji covered arcade, on the right in a small building with lots of tiny bars.

Pig and Whistle This is probably the best-known and one of the oldest expatriate bars in Osaka, as well as one of the easiest to find. Through the years, the number of foreign customers has fallen to less than 30% (I remember when it was almost exclusively foreign), but remaining are its friendly atmosphere, dartboards for entertainment, happy hour until 7:30pm, and munchies that include, of course, fish and chips. Hours are Sunday through Thursday 5pm to midnight, Friday to Saturday 5pm to 1am.

There's also a branch in Umeda south of Osaka Station at 2–5 Sonezaki (☎ 06/6361-3198; open daily 5pm–midnight). Across Building, 2nd floor, 2–6–14 Shinsaibashi-Suji. ☎ 06/6213-6911. Station: Namba or Shinsaibashi (4 min.). On the east side of Midosuji Street, a couple blocks north of Dotonbori Canal.

Sam & Dave Four With exposed, wrapped pipes and fluorescent lighting, this bar with a dance floor and pool table stages events several times a month, including salsa lessons every Tuesday. Happy hour is until 9pm. It attracts both a Japanese and *gaijin* crowd.

Attracting a larger foreign clientele is **Sam & Dave Five** in Nagahoribashi, across from the post office (☎ 06/6251-5333), which has an even bigger dance floor and holds salsa nights on Thursdays; upscale **Sam & Dave Two** Shin-saibashi, 1 block east of Midosuji St. next to McDonald's (☎ 06/6243-6848), is the hot spot for hip hop, soul, and R&B. Hours are Sunday through Thursday 7pm to 4am, Friday to Saturday 7pm to 5:30am. Plaza Umeshin Building, 4–15–19

Nishi-tenma. ㊦ **06/6365-1688**. Fri and Sat ¥1,000 (\$8.35) cover, which includes 1 drink. Station: JR Kitashinchi (2 min.), Umeda (5 min.), Osaka (7 min.). Southeast of Osaka Station on a triangle-shaped parcel of land where Midosuji Dori curves southward before crossing the river and Nakanoshima Island.

5 Kobe

589km (366 miles) W of Tokyo; 75km (47 miles) W of Kyoto; 31km (19 miles) W of Osaka

In January 1995, the world was riveted by news of one of the worst natural disasters of that decade: the Great Hanshin Earthquake that struck Kobe, killing more than 6,400 people and destroying much of the city. In the years since, Kobe has risen from the ashes with more attractions, hotels, and urban redevelopment than ever before and with only a few tell-tale signs of the city's grimmest hours. Indeed, if it weren't for several earthquake memorials and a museum dedicated to the event, visitors would never guess at the devastation of just 10 years ago.

Blessed with the calm waters of the Seto Inland Sea, Kobe (the capital of Hyogo Prefecture) has served Japan as an important port town for centuries. Even today, its port is the heart of the city, its *raison d'être*. One of the first ports to begin accepting foreign traders in 1868 following Japan's 2 centuries of isolation, this vibrant city of 1½ million inhabitants is quite multicultural, with foreigners from more than 110 different nations residing here. Each group of immigrants has brought with it a rich heritage, and there are a number of fine restaurants serving every kind of cuisine—Western, Chinese, Korean, and Indian—as well as many steakhouses offering that famous local delicacy, Kobe beef.

Equally famous is Kobe's wonderful nightlife, crammed into a small, navigable, and rather intimate quarter of neon lights, cozy bars, brawling pubs, and sophisticated nightclubs. As one resident of Kobe told me, "We don't have a lot of tourist sights in Kobe, so we make up for it in night life." Yet the attractions Kobe does offer are unique to Japan, including a neighborhood of Western-style residences built around the turn of the 20th century, and a museum devoted to fashion. The people of Kobe are also proud of the 1998 opening of the world's longest suspension bridge, Akashi Kaikyo, one of a series of bridges linking Honshu with Shikoku.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** If you're arriving at Kansai International Airport (KIX; see "Getting There," under Osaka, on p. 387), there are a couple options for travel onward to Kobe. Easiest are the **limousine buses** departing KIX every 15 minutes for Sannomiya Station, costing ¥1,800 (\$15) one-way and taking about 75 minutes. If you want to use your **Japan Rail Pass**, take a *kaisoku* (rapid train making only stops) to Osaka Station and change there for the JR Kobe Line's 20-minute ride to Sannomiya Station (considered the heart of the city). If you're staying in a hotel closer to Shin-Kobe Station, take the JR Haruka train from the airport to Shin-Osaka Station and transfer there for a speedy Shinkansen connection to Shin-Kobe Station (see the Osaka section on p. 390 for detailed information).

In 2005, Kobe should have an airport of its own on Port Island.

By Train The **Shinkansen** bullet train takes ¾ hours from Tokyo, 31 minutes from Kyoto, and about 14 minutes from Osaka; the fare from Tokyo for an unreserved seat is ¥13,760 (\$115). All Shinkansen trains arrive at **Shin-Kobe Station**, which is linked to **Sannomiya Station** (considered the heart of the city) via a 3-minute subway ride (or a 20-min. walk). If you're arriving from nearby

Osaka, Kyoto, Himeji, or Okayama, it may be easiest to take a local train stopping at Sannomiya Station if you're staying in one of the area's hotels.

By Bus Buses depart from Tokyo Station's Yaesu south exit for Kobe every night at 10:40, arriving in Kobe at 7:30am. They also depart nightly from Shinjuku Station's New South Exit at 11pm, arriving in Kobe at 7:42am. The one-way fare is ¥8,690 (\$72).

VISITOR INFORMATION There are tourist information offices at **Shin-Kobe Station** (☎ 078/241-9550; open daily 10am–6pm) and near **Sannomiya Station**, across the street and to the right from the south exit, on Flower Road (☎ 078/322-0220; open daily 9am–7pm). The English-speaking staff can provide maps and sightseeing information and make hotel reservations. Limited tourist information is available online at www.city.kobe.jp.

Information on Kobe's sights, festivals, and attractions appears in the monthly *Kansai Time Out*, available at bookstores, restaurants, and tourist-oriented locations for ¥300 (\$2.50).

INTERNET ACCESS The **Comic Café**, on the third floor of the Heiwa Building just north of Sannomiya Station (☎ 078/241-8815), is open 24 hours and charges ¥380 (\$3.15) for the first hour and then ¥150 (\$1.25) for each subsequent 30 minutes. The **Hyogo International Plaza**, located a 10-minute walk south of Nada Station in the new HAT urban renewal development at 1–5–1 Kaigandori, Wakinoama, Chuo-ku (☎ 078/230-3060; open Mon–Fri 9am–8pm, Sat 9am–5pm), offers free Internet access.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND Squeezed between Mount Rokko rising in the north and the shores of the Seto Inland Sea to the south, Kobe stretches some 29km (18 miles) along the coastline but in many places is less than 3.2km (2 miles) wide. It's made up of many wards (*ku*) such as Nada-ku, Chuo-ku, and Hyogo-ku. The heart of the city lies around Sannomiya, Motomachi, and Kobe stations in the **Chuo-ku (Central Ward)**. It's here you'll find the city's night life, its port, its restaurants, its shopping centers, and most of its hotels. Unlike many other Japanese cities, many of the major streets in Kobe have names with signs posted in English, so it's easier to get around here than other Japanese cities. Additionally, the maps provided by the tourist office are good.

Because the city isn't very wide, you can walk to most points north and south of Sannomiya Station. South of Sannomiya Station is the **Sannomiya Center Gai** covered-arcade shopping, beyond which lies Kobe's business and administrative district. North of Sannomiya Station are bars and restaurants clustered around narrow streets like **Higashimon Street**. Kitano-zaka leads to **Kitano-cho** (usually shortened to Kitano) with its Western-style houses, about a 15-minute walk north of Sannomiya Station. **Shin-Kobe Station** is a 20-minute walk north of Sannomiya. Running from Shin-Kobe Station south through Sannomiya all the way to the port is a flower-lined road—called, appropriately enough, **Flower Road**.

Tips Insider's Kobe

English-speaking **volunteer guides** are available daily to provide free, personalized tours of the Sannomiya and Kitano areas. Reservations should be made 1 week in advance by calling ☎ 078/321-3921.

About a 10-minute walk west of Sannomiya Station is **Motomachi Station**, south of which lies the fashionable Motomachi covered-arcade shopping street, **Chinatown**, and **Meriken Park**. The next stop on the JR line from Motomachi Station is **Kobe Station**, just south of which is **Harborland**, a waterfront region with hotels, restaurants, and the colorful Mosaic outdoor restaurant and shopping complex.

Two train stops east of Sannomiya Station is **Nada Ward**, home of several renowned breweries, as well as one of the city's most ambitious urban renewal projects. Called **HAT Kobe** (an abbreviation of Happy Active Town), it's a mixed-use neighborhood of apartment complexes, research facilities, schools, and museums, including the new Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution, which chronicles the Great Hanshin Earthquake.

Because of restricted space, Kobe has also constructed two artificial islands in its harbor, Port Island and Rokko Island. Farther afield, on Mount Rokko, is the Arima Onsen Spa.

A 13km (8-mile) **City Loop Line** bus, distinguished by its old-fashioned appearance, passes all major attractions, including Kitano, Chinatown, Meriken Park, and Harborland. Buses run every 15 to 20 minutes from about 9am to 5 or 6pm, with the route marked on the map distributed by the tourist office. It costs ¥250 (\$2.10) for adults and ¥130 (\$1.10) for children per ticket. A 1-day pass, allowing you to get off and reboard as often as you like, costs ¥650 (\$5.40) for adults and ¥330 (\$2.75) for children.

You can also use the **JR Local Commuter train**, which includes stops at Sannomiya, Motomachi, and Kobe stations, if you don't mind walking to destinations north and south of its stations (the City Loop Line buses will get you closer to major attractions). The subway is useful only for transportation between Shin-Kobe and Sannomiya stations. The **Portliner Monorail** connects Sannomiya with Port Island, while the Rokko Liner travels between JR Sumiyoshi Station and Rokko Island.

EXPLORING THE CITY

In addition to the sights below, you might wish to drop by **City Hall** on Flower Road, where on the 24th floor there's an **observatory** open free to the public daily from 9am to 9pm. Farther south on Flower Road, at the southern end of Higashi Yuenchi Park, is the **Memorial Zone**, where the Flame of Hope created by flames gathered from cities all over Japan burns in memory of those lost in the earthquake. Nearby, an underground passageway leads to a meditation rotunda inscribed with the names of the quake's victims.

KITANO

When Kobe was chosen as one of five international ports following the Meiji Restoration, foreign traders and diplomats who settled here built homes in much the same style as those they left behind in their native lands. Approximately 30 of these Western-style homes, called *ijinkan*, remain on a hill north of Sannomiya Station called Kitano-cho. Because the area seems so exotic to young Japanese, this is the number-one draw for domestic visitors, who come also to shop the area's many boutiques.

As of this writing, 22 Victorian- and Gothic-style homes are open to the public, many with lovely views of the sea from verandas and bay windows. Although you may not be interested in visiting all of them, Kitano is very pleasant for an hour's stroll. It's located about a 15-minute walk north of Sannomiya Station or

a 10-minute walk west from Shin-Kobe Station. Or take the City Loop Line to Kitano Ijinkan.

If all you want to do is take a quick look inside one of the former homes, the **Rhine no Yakata**, 2–10–24 Kitano-cho (☎ 078/222-3403; open daily 9am–6pm in summer and 9:30am–5pm in winter; closed 4th Thurs of every month), is open free of charge though it's unfurnished. Home of a Frenchwoman, Madame Drewell, it's typical of European homes of the period, with an upper-floor sun room overlooking the city and harbor.

Otherwise, the two I recommend are the **Moegi no Yakata**, 3–10–11 Kitano-cho (☎ 078/222-3310; open daily 9:30am–5pm in winter, 9am–6pm in summer; closed the 2nd Wed of every month), a pale-green, 100-year-old home built for a former American consul general, Hunter Sharp, and filled with antiques; and **Kasamidori-no-Yakata** ★, 3–13–3 Kitano-cho (☎ 078/242-3223; open daily 9:30am–5pm in winter, 9am–6pm in summer; closed 4th Tues of every month), popularly referred to as the Weathercock House because of its cock weathervane. This 1909 brick residence was built by a German merchant and is probably Kobe's most famous home if not its most elaborate. Admission to either home, located across from one another, is ¥300 (\$2.50).

Another home of note (because it contains porcelain, glass, and art, not because of its historic value) is **Uroko no Ie**, 2–20–4 Kitano-cho (☎ 078/242-6530; open daily 9am–6pm in summer, to 5pm in winter), which has a castle-like exterior and is nicknamed the Fish-scale House because of its slate walls. It contains lovely antiques, including Meissen porcelain and Tiffany glass, as well as a small private museum of Western 18th- to 20th-century art, with a few works by Andrew Wyeth, Utrillo, and others. Admission is ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for children.

A GARDEN RETREAT If you're a gardener, want a respite from city life, or simply want to spend an hour in a cooler climate, take the Shin-Kobe ropeway located next to Shin-Kobe Station for a 10-minute ride to the **Nunobiki Herb Garden** ★ (☎ 078/271-1131), with its lovely, meandering, fragrant gardens planted with various flowering shrubs and herbs and offering great views over Kobe. Be sure to take the ropeway to the end (don't get off at the 1st stop) and then walk downhill. The garden opens daily at 10am, closing at 5pm on weekdays, 8:30pm on Saturdays and during peak season (mid-July to Aug), and 7:30pm on Sundays (Dec–Mar, it closes daily at 5pm). It's closed for 2 weeks in January. Admission, including round-trip by ropeway, is ¥1,200 (\$12) for adults, half price for children.

CHINATOWN ★

Like the Kitano-cho area, **Chinatown** (called Nankin-machi), a 3-minute walk south of Motomachi Station (or to the Sakaemachi 1-chome stop on the City Loop Line bus), is worth a walk-through for its lively street scene, with sidewalk vendors selling snacks and with open-fronted souvenir shops and produce stands. If the sidewalk vendors tempt you, eat your snack in the central square called **Nankin Park**, adorned with statues representing the animals of the 12-year Chinese astrological calendar. Chinatown's public restroom, called **Garyoden**, which means "palace of a secluded wise man," is certainly one of Japan's most colorful—its outer wall is decorated with five-clawed dragons and is based on a famous Chinese epic about a dragonlike hero; it's located a block off the main street. You may also want to come to Chinatown for a meal (see "Where to Dine," beginning on p. 418).

MERIKEN PARK

Meriken Park, a 10-minute walk south of Motomachi Station or a minute's walk from the Meriken Park stop on the City Loop Line bus, was established to commemorate the birthplace of Kobe Port. I find Kobe's port fascinating. Unlike many harbor cities where the port is located far from the center of town, Kobe's is right there, demanding attention and getting it. For a bird's-eye view of the whole operation, go to the **Kobe Port Tower** (☎ 078/391-6751) on Nakatortei Pier (open daily 9am–8pm; to 6pm in winter, to 9pm July–Sept). Opened in 1963, the tower is designed to resemble a Japanese drum, a cylindrical shape with the middle squeezed together. It's almost 180m (600 ft.) tall, topped by a glass-enclosed five-story observatory.

Right beside the Port Tower is the **Kobe Maritime Museum**, 2–2 Hatobacho (☎ 078/391-6751; Tues–Sun 10am–5pm), topped by a huge metal frame that resembles billowing sails or sea waves. Recounting the 130-year history of Kobe Port, it contains model ships, a “pilot room” complete with whistles and engine sounds, videos that explore Kobe's past and possible future, information on ports around the world, and a display of ancient vessels from a Venetian gondola to a South Pacific dugout canoe. But most interesting—and terrifying—are the English-language videos showing the aftermath of the 1995 earthquake with rampaging fires, buckled streets, overturned port containers, and crumpled buildings. You'll spend about an hour here.

A **combination ticket** for both the Port Tower and the Maritime Museum is ¥900 (\$7.50) for adults, half price for children. If you buy the tickets separately, they're ¥600 (\$5) each for adults, half price for kids.

On the eastern edge of Meriken Park is the **Port of Kobe Earthquake Memorial**, dedicated to the thousands of people who lost their lives in the tragic 1995 earthquake. Established with the intent of preserving some of the quake's horrific force (250,000 buildings and homes were destroyed), it shows unrepaired damage, including tilted lampposts and a submerged and broken pier.

KOBE HARBORLAND

Kobe Harborland is a leisure center that's fun to stroll and browse. It's a few minutes' walk from either Kobe Station or Meriken Park, or you can take the City Loop Line to Harborland. For shopping, stop by Harbor Circus with its many boutiques or Kobe Hankyu department store, but best is **Mosaic**, an outdoor restaurant and shopping complex designed to resemble a Mediterranean village. Through the use of varying architectural and color schemes, it avoids the generic mall atmosphere, and by offering a diversity of ethnic goods and foods, it mirrors Kobe's international roots. Shops here are open daily from 11am to 8pm.

Beside it is **Mosaic Garden**, a small amusement park for younger children complete with kiddie rides, carousel, roller coaster, enclosed Ferris wheel, and games arcade. It's open from 11am to 10pm daily, with rides costing ¥300 to ¥600 (\$2.50–\$5).

MUSEUMS WORTH CHECKING OUT

If you're on your way to the Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution, below, it might be worthwhile to check out what's being shown at the **Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art** practically next door (☎ 078/262-0901; www.artm.pref.hyogo.jp). Designed by renowned Japanese architect Tadao Ando, it displays contemporary art, prints, sculpture, and other works produced by artists with connections to Hyogo Prefecture, as well as temporary exhibits from around the world. It's open Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm and

charges ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) for high-school and college students, and ¥250 (\$2.10) for children; temporary exhibits cost more.

Disaster Reduction and Human Renovation Institution ★★☆☆ Despite its rather official-sounding name, this museum gives a human dimension to the Great Hanshin Earthquake, which measured 7.3 on the Richter scale. Sheathed in glass and built to withstand both vertical and horizontal earthquakes, the museum vividly conveys what happened during the first moments of the earthquake and the weeks, months, and years that followed. English-speaking volunteers are on hand to help explain some of the museum's more technical displays.

A visit to the museum begins with a powerful 7-minute film that re-creates the exact moment the earthquake struck, with computer-generated scenes that show buildings imploding or bursting into flames and highways collapsing. From the movie theater, visitors emerge into a life-size diorama depicting a typical Kobe neighborhood destroyed by the quake. They then enter another movie theater where a 13-minute documentary shows actual footage shot shortly after the quake and during the weeks that followed, presented through the eyes of a teenage survivor. Other displays in the museum concentrate on the individual experiences of survivors, emergency relief, and reconstruction. A hands-on section helps visitors learn how construction techniques can minimize and even prevent earthquake damage and dispenses information on disaster management. There is no other museum in Japan quite like this one; you'll probably spend an hour here.

1-5-2 Wakinohama Kaigan-Dori, Chuo-ku. ☎ 078/262-5050. www.dri.ne.jp. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) high-school and college students, ¥250 (\$2.10) children. Tues-Sun 10am-6pm (to 8pm Fri and Sat). You must enter 1 hr. before closing. Station: JR Nada (10 min. south).

Hakutsuru Sake Brewery Museum ★☆☆☆ Everything you ever wanted to know about sake production is available at this former brewery, with English videos and pamphlets describing the various painstaking steps and comparing the old techniques to those used today. Hakutsuru, established in 1743, is one of many sake breweries in this part of Kobe; its actual brewery is now across the street (closed to the public). Plan on spending 30 minutes on your self-guided tour, which ends with hints on how to enjoy sake and—what would a brewery tour be without this?—free tastings.

4-5-5 Sumiyoshi-minami-machi, Higashinada-ku. ☎ 078/822-8907. Free admission. Tues-Sun 9:30am-4:30pm. Station: Hanshin Sumiyoshi (5 min.); JR Sumiyoshi (15 min.).

Kobe Fashion Museum ★☆☆☆ *Finds* Opened in 1997 and located on artificial Rokko Island, this is Japan's first museum devoted to fashion, housed in a contemporary, sophisticated setting that does justice to the high-brow costumes it contains. Temporary displays devoted to individual designers (there was a great show by John Galliano on one of my visits, in a setting designed by Japanese architect Tadao Ando) allow closer inspection than you could ever get at a fashion show. Other displays, which are imaginative tableaux complete with visual images, music, and lighting, may feature anything from 20th-century gowns by Christian Dior and Nina Ricci to extravagant Kabuki costumes or ethnic clothing worn by indigenous peoples from around the world. Displays change four or five times a year, rotating the many costumes owned by the museum. In all, a very entertaining, unique museum, and a must-see if you're addicted to fashion and have an extra hour.

2-9 Koyochi-naka, Rokko Island. ☎ 078/858-0050. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥250 (\$2.10) children and seniors. Thurs-Tues 10am-6pm. Closed 1 week during exhibit changes. Take the local JR train to Sumiyoshi Station, transferring there for the Rokkoliner monorail to Island Center.

Finds Silver & Gold

On the opposite side of Mount Rokko is **Arima Onsen**, one of Japan's oldest hot-spring spas. There are two public baths here: the  **Kin-no-Yu** (☎ 078/904-0680), or Gold Spring, with copper-colored waters that have twice the salinity and iron of seawater; and the  **Gin-no-Yu** (☎ 078/904-0256), or Silver Spring, with transparent water rich in carbonic acid. It's said that if you bathe in both these waters and drink carbonated water, you'll be cured of all ailments. The Kin-no-yu, open daily 8am to 10pm (closed the 2nd and 4th Tues of every month), charges ¥650 (\$5.40), while the Gin-no-yu, open daily 9am to 9pm (closed the 1st and 3rd Tues of every month), charges ¥550 (\$4.60). Buses from Sannomiya Station reach Arima Onsen in 40 minutes and cost ¥680 (\$5.65) one-way. You can also travel by train to Rokko Station, followed by a trip by bus, cable car, and ropeway. Contact the Kobe Tourist Information office for more information.

WHERE TO STAY

Note: Some hotels charge more for Saturday nights and nights before holidays, as well as during peak season (Golden Week, summer holidays, and New Year's).

EXPENSIVE

Hotel Okura Kobe   *Kids* This majestic 35-story hotel has the prestige of the Okura name, as well as a grand location right beside Meriken Park and the Port Tower; it's within easy walking distance of the Motomachi covered shopping arcade and Chinatown. Its inviting lobby has views of a small garden (the only hotel garden in downtown Kobe) against a backdrop formed by the Maritime Museum and the port. Each elegantly appointed room has all the comforts you'd expect of a first-class hotel, plus the bonus of great views from its more expensive rooms, which are on higher floors facing the harbor or the city with Mount Rokko rising behind it. Rooms on the 27th floor also offer high-speed Internet connection. In short, this hotel appeals to everyone from families—its target customer—to business travelers. Even the imperial family makes this their home base when in Kobe. **Tip:** Upon check-in, ask for immediate free membership in the Okura Club International, which allows late checkout, free use of the health club and both outdoor and indoor pools, and other privileges.

2-1 Hatoba-cho, Chuo-ku, Kobe 650-8560. ☎ 800/526-2281 in the U.S. or 078/333-0111. Fax 078/333-6673. www.kobe.hotelokura.co.jp. 489 units. ¥14,000–¥21,000 (\$117–\$175) single; ¥20,000–¥36,000 (\$167–\$300) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Motomachi (10 min. south). Loop Line bus: Meriken Park (1 min.). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; bar; 2 lounges; outdoor pool (free with membership); health club with gym, sauna, and heated indoor lap pool (free with membership); 2 lit outdoor tennis courts; children's day-care center (fee: ¥5,000/\$42 for 2 hr.; reservations necessary 5 days in advance); concierge; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade; salon; room service (6am–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

Shinkobe Oriental Hotel This hotel is directly connected to Shin-Kobe Station—very convenient if you're arriving by Shinkansen train (though the hotel's entrance is a bit hard to find). Rising 37 stories, with rooms on the 14th to 33rd floors, it offers great views of Kobe and the bay or the mountains from fully equipped but rather plain rooms. Rates are based on room size and floor, with top floors commanding the grandest views at the highest prices. Rooms

with broadband Internet access are also available. A plus is the large mall occupying the first four floors, with many additional choices in dining.

1 Kitano-cho, Chuo-ku, Kobe 650-0002. ☎ **078/291-1121**. Fax 078/291-1151. www.orientalhotel.co.jp. 600 units. ¥13,000–¥19,000 (\$108–\$158) single; ¥23,000–¥34,000 (\$192–\$283) twin; ¥23,000–¥30,000 (\$192–\$250) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shin-Kobe (1 min.). **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; bar; 2 lounges; health club with gym, indoor pool, and sauna (fee: ¥5,000/\$42); shopping arcade; salon; room service (6am–11am and 5pm–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Hotel Monterey Amalie ★ Taking its name from a long-ago Dutch sailing vessel and decorated with a nautical theme, this property is part of a smart chain of boutique hotels that targets mostly female Japanese travelers with old-world European decor and atmosphere. From its ivy-covered facade to whitewashed walls (some of which could use a fresh coat) and heavy-beamed ceilings, it looks much older than its 1992 construction date. Wood-floored guest rooms feature natural wooden furniture, sheer curtains and heavy wooden shutters, tiled bathrooms, and free-standing wardrobes. Ask for a room overlooking Ikuta Shrine, but since occupancy is an enviable 85%, book early. Otherwise, try nearby sister hotel Monterey Kobe (☎ **078/392-7111**), with similar prices and a cloisterlike atmosphere.

2–2–28 Nakayamate Dori, Chuo-ku, Kobe 650-0004. ☎ **078/334-1711**. Fax 078/334-1788. 69 units. ¥8,000–¥10,000 (\$67–\$83) single; ¥18,000–¥21,000 (\$150–\$175) double; ¥19,000–¥25,000 (\$158–\$208) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Sannomiya (10 min.). Just west of Ikuta Shrine. **Amenities:** Restaurant (French); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Hotel Tor Road ★ An imitation fireplace, knickknacks on the mantle, antiques, a drop-leaf desk, and dark-wood wainscoting lend an English country atmosphere to this tourist hotel's lobby. The decent-size rooms are clean and tastefully decorated with double-size beds and larger-than-usual bathrooms, with twins and doubles even providing a separate sink area. The most expensive rooms are so-called “designer theme rooms” on the ninth floor. The “cat” room, for example, has the logo of a cat repeated on the drapes, pillows, sheets, and elsewhere, but I fail to see why anyone would pay more for it.

3–1–19 Nakayamate Dori, Chuo-ku, Kobe 650-0004. ☎ **078/391-6691**. Fax 078/391-6570. htorroad@oak.ocn.ne.jp. 78 units. ¥7,500–¥9,000 (\$63–\$75) single; ¥15,000–¥19,000 (\$125–\$158) double or twin. ¥1,000 (\$8.35) more per room Sat, days before holidays, and peak season. Rates include buffet breakfast. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Sannomiya or Motomachi (10 min.). On Tor Rd. just north of Ikuta Shinmichi Dori. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Italian); in-room massage; same-day laundry service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Kobe Meriken Park Oriental Hotel ★★ An outstanding location on a spit of land jutting seaward from the edge of Meriken Park (it's practically on the water and surrounded by a park) makes this Kobe's best hotel with a view—which it capitalizes on by providing each room with a balcony with views of Kobe's harbor and of the city as it rises up the hills. Popular with couples (weddings are big here) and women, the hotel looks like one of the many cruise ships that dock nearby, rising 14 stories in a lopsided half circle. Its center is hollow, an airy atrium filled with palm trees and bubbling fountains. Rooms, which vary in size and view, come with all the basics, with the best views considered those that overlook Harborland and its amusement park. Don't be alarmed by the encampment of homeless just outside the hotel—they're harmless. (Parks have become popular sites for Japan's ever-growing number of homeless, who happen

to be very orderly and organized, with encampments that consist of homemade shelters—made primarily of blue plastic—washed clothing hanging on clotheslines, and even locks on the shelters.) But in case you don't want to walk, a free shuttle provides service to both Sannomiya and Kobe stations every 20 or 30 minutes.

5–6 Hatoba-cho, Chuo-ku, Kobe 650-0042. ☎ **078/325-8111**. Fax 078/325-8106. 331 units. ¥10,000 (\$83) single; ¥16,000 – ¥35,000 (\$133–\$292) double; ¥23,000 – ¥28,000 (\$192–\$233) twin. ¥4,000 (\$33) more per room Sat., days before holidays, and Aug. AE, DC, MC, V. Free shuttle service every 20–30 min. from Sannomiya Station (east exit, from Rte. 2 Hwy) and Kobe Station. (If you arrive at Shin-Kobe Station, take the subway to Sannomiya Station to catch the free shuttle.) Loop Line bus: Nakatottei Pier (5 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, teppanyaki with Kobe beef, Cantonese, Western buffet); 2 lounges; indoor swimming pool (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35); children's day-care center (¥5,000/\$42 for 2 hr.); salon; room service (6:30am–11:30pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, mini-bar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Seaside Hotel Maiko Villa Kobe ★ *Kids* Located on a hill in West Kobe beside the world's longest suspension bridge, about a 20-minute train ride from Sannomiya Station, Maiko Villa is a bit far from the town center but its inconvenient location does offer some advantages, including cheaper prices than those of hotels in the center. Situated near the sea with the sound of seagulls and the faint scent of saltwater, it exudes a resortlike atmosphere, making it a good place to relax in a more leisurely setting—at the man-made sandy beach nearby or the hotel outdoor pool (open July and Aug). Its grounds are lovely, with ancient dwarf pines that date back to the early 1900s, when Emperor Meiji once had a second home here. Popular with vacationing Japanese and for marriage ceremonies (more than 700 a year), the modern hotel offers a variety of rooms, most with views of the sea, fishing boats, and the bridge (which changes color at night). Best are the deluxe twins—corner rooms, they boast heart-shaped tubs where you can bathe looking out at the sea. Avoid the 26 singles and doubles; facing inland, they are used mainly by bus drivers and tour guides. Better and almost as reasonable are the Japanese-style and combination (with both tatami rooms and twin beds) rooms in the annex, almost all with balconies facing the sea. In addition to the outdoor pool and nearby beach, kids will like the playground across the street.

11–18 Higashi Maiko-cho, Tarumi-ku, Kobe 655-0047. ☎ **078/706-3711**. Fax 078/706-2212. 251 units. ¥7,500 (\$63) single; ¥11,000 (\$92) double; ¥15,000 – ¥20,000 (\$125–\$167) twin. Japanese-style rooms ¥12,800 (\$107) double. Combination rooms ¥14,600 – ¥24,000 (\$122–\$200). ¥1,500 (\$13) more per person in peak season. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: From Sannomiya Station, take the JR Kobe Line rapid express (Kaisoku) 20 min. to JR Maiko (5 min.). Follow signs and then take the hillside elevator. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants (Chinese, Japanese, French/Italian, coffee shop); bar; outdoor pool (free to hotel guests); 300-seat concert hall with piano recitals twice a week; salon; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet (main building only).

INEXPENSIVE

Green Hill Hotel Urban Between Sannomiya and Shin-Kobe stations, this simple business hotel with mostly single rooms in a dormitory-like setting is primarily a place to park your head at night. Clean rooms are about as small as they come, most without closets and with glazed windows and minuscule plastic-unit bathrooms. Free tea is dispensed from machines on each floor. About the only thing setting this hotel apart from thousands of other business hotels across the country is its automatic check-in via machine (you need a credit card); you can ask for assistance from the front desk, but English is limited. Don't confuse this with the older Green Hill Hotel around the corner.

2–5–16 Kano-cho, Chuo-ku, Kobe 650-0001. ☎ 078/222-1221. Fax 078/242-1194. 102 units. ¥6,500 (\$54) single; ¥13,000 (\$108) twin or double. Rates include buffet breakfast and tax. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Shin-Kobe or Sannomiya (10 min.); between the stations, on Flower Rd. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers; nonsmoking rooms (singles only). *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (singles and twins only), hair dryer.

Toyoko Inn Kobe-Sannomiya *Value* Opened in 2003, this Kobe addition to one of Japan's fastest-growing business hotel chains surpasses others for such perks as free Internet access, free domestic phone calls, free movies (but only in Japanese), and free breakfasts. Rooms are small but clean, and female travelers even get a cosmetic set geared just for them.

1–2–2 Miyukidori, Chuo-ku, Kobe 651-0087. ☎ 078/271-1045. Fax 078/271-1046. www.toyoko-inn.com. 135 units. ¥5,800 (\$48) single; ¥7,800 (\$65) twin or double. Rates include breakfast and tax. MC, V. Station: Sannomiya (8 min.); southeast of the station. **Amenities:** In-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, trouser press.

WHERE TO DINE

With its sizable foreign population, Kobe is a good place to dine on international cuisine, including Indian and Chinese food. The greatest concentration of Chinese restaurants is along a pedestrian lane in Chinatown, called **Nankin-machi** by the locals, just a couple minutes' walk south of Motomachi Station. If you're on a budget, you may just want to wander through and buy sticky buns or other inexpensive fare from street stalls.

EXPENSIVE

Alain Chapel ★★ FRENCH For elegant French dining, Alain Chapel is one of the city's top choices. In a stately drawing-room setting with great panoramic views of either Kobe city or the sea, this restaurant serves the creations of French chef Alain Chapel, whose set meals are popular with his Japanese clientele. If you decide to dine a la carte, you might start with lobster salad and then try Kobe beef, lamb, pigeon, or duck. Average dinner checks, including wine, tax, and service, are generally around ¥18,000 (\$150) per person. Clearly, recession is a foreign word here, though set lunches are reasonable.

Kobe Portopia Hotel, 31st floor, 6–10–2 Minatojima, Port Island. ☎ 078/302-1111. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥3,400–¥9,000 (\$28–\$75); set dinner ¥7,500–¥18,000 (\$63–\$150); set lunch ¥2,800–¥6,000 (\$23–\$50). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm (last order). Portliner Monorail from Sannomiya Station to Shimin Hiroba Station (2 min.); or free shuttle service every 20 min. from Sannomiya and Shin-Kobe stations.

Kitano Club ★ FRENCH Located on a hill overlooking the city, this well-known restaurant with a country-club setting has been offering meals with a

Kobe Beef

Kobe is famous for its marbled beef, so tender that the best cuts virtually melt in your mouth. Unlike in countries such as Australia and the United States where cattle graze in open fields, in villages around Kobe, cattle are hand-fed barley, corn, rice, bran, molasses, rapeseed oil, and soybean meal. The rumor that cattle are fed beer is untrue—they may, however, get one bottle each as a farewell present just before being sent off to the slaughterhouse. There are only a few head of cattle per household around Kobe, so each gets a lot of individual attention. For exercise, the cattle are used for labor, and after the workout they are washed and massaged with water and straw brushes.

view for more than 25 years. It's especially popular with middle-aged Japanese women, who come to take advantage of the daily lunch special, called Queen's Lunch, for ¥3,000 (\$25)—and, yes, guys can order it, too. There are also set steak lunches and dinners. The dinner menu also includes fish of the day, lamb, and duck.

1–5–7 Kitano-cho. ☎ 078/222-5123. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥2,800–¥7,200 (\$23–\$60); set dinner ¥8,000–¥10,000 (\$67–\$83); set lunch ¥3,000–¥7,800 (\$25–\$65). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5:50–9pm (last order). Station: Shin-Kobe (7 min.). Go west on Kitano Rd. from Shinkobe Oriental Hotel, taking the 1st street on the right (when you see the Kitano Chapel); it will be on your left.

Wakkoqu ★ TEPPANYAKI STEAKS This tiny, second-floor restaurant has room for only 30 diners at two counters, where expert chefs cook sirloin, tenderloin, or other cuts of tender Kobe beef on the grill in front of them. Fixed-course meals come with side dishes like soup and fried vegetables. This is a good place to try Kobe's most famous product.

Hillside Terrace, 1–22–13 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/222-0678. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥6,800–¥13,000 (\$57–\$108); set lunch ¥2,500–¥4,500 (\$21–\$38). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily noon–9:30pm (last order). Station: Sannomiya (7 min.). On Pearl St. just east of Kitano-zaka.

MODERATE

Gaylord ★ INDIAN One of Kobe's best-known and oldest (more than 30 years in business) Indian restaurants, the elegantly decorated Gaylord belongs to the famous franchise (Bombay, New Delhi, Hong Kong, London, San Francisco, and Los Angeles) and attracts a large Indian clientele. The extensive menu includes such delights as prawns highly spiced and cooked with potatoes, marinated lamb pieces cooked in cream and spices, and tandoori fish, chicken, or mutton. Vegetarian selections vary and include vegetables cooked in cream sauce with cashew nuts, potatoes with cauliflower, dal (puréed lentil fried with butter), and spinach and cheese cooked in spices. It's customary to order one dish per person and then share. If you're by yourself, you can order one of the set menus starting at ¥3,000 (\$25). The mini-tandoori set, for example, comes with fish and chicken tandoori, shish kabob, Indian bread, salad, chicken curry, a dry vegetable dish, rice, and tea or coffee.

7th floor, Bacchus Building, 1–26–1 Nakayamate. ☎ 078/251-4359. Reservations recommended. Curries ¥1,300–¥1,900 (\$11–\$16); tandoori ¥1,500–¥2,400 (\$13–\$20); set dinner ¥3,000–¥5,800 (\$27–\$48); set lunch ¥900–¥2,200 (\$7.50–\$18). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–9:30pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9:30pm. Station: Sannomiya (10 min.). On the north side of Nakayamate Dori (also called Yamate Kansen Dori), where it meets Higashimon St.

Hard Rock Cafe *Kids* AMERICAN Japan's fifth Hard Rock Cafe offers the usual rock 'n' roll memorabilia, gold records, and items that once belonged to famous musicians as well as a straightforward American menu that includes burgers, barbecue chicken, grilled fajitas, steaks, and sandwiches. Its familiar foods are sure to please finicky young eaters; its long hours make it a good choice for a mid-afternoon or late-night meal; and its happy hour Monday to Friday from 4 to 7pm also makes it a good place to wind down after a busy day.

Harbor Circus, 1–3–3 Higashi Kawasaki-cho. ☎ 078/366-5369. Main dishes ¥1,380–¥2,780 (\$12–\$23). AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 11am–3am. Loop Line bus: Kobe Station, South exit. Station: Kobe (3 min.). Take the DuoKobe underground shopping passage, keeping to the right and following signs to Harbor Circus.

Il Giappone VARIED JAPANESE You have to be somewhat adventuresome to try this boisterous, lively drinking and eating establishment. (There is no English-language menu, no plastic food displays, and it's a crowded, noisy place,

so the timid might want to go where the menu or food is more clear cut.) After walking down pebbled, lamp-lit steps, you'll find yourself in a rustic but chic environment with gleaming wood floors, bamboo accents, and a warren of tatami rooms and counter seating (I prefer the counters, where you can watch food being prepared and have dishes handed to you via long-handled wooden paddles). The menu lists grilled fish, *harumaki* (spring rolls), fried shrimp, tofu, and other seasonal dishes, but it's only in Japanese. If that's too intimidating, easiest is probably to order the *osuzume course* (chef's selection) and leave the decisions to him.

1–5–8 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/381-0033. Main dishes ¥580–¥1,200 (\$4.85–\$10); *osuzume courses* ¥3,800 and ¥4,800 (\$32 and \$40). AE, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Station: Sannomiya (6 min.). On Higashimon St., on the east side, beside Lawson convenience store.

141 Steakland Kobe STEAKS If you want to eat teppanyaki steak but can't afford the high prices of Kobe beef, one of the cheapest places to go is Steakland Kobe, which is used to tourists and offers an English-language menu. Lunch specials, served from 11am to 3pm, feature steak (cooked on a hot plate in front of you), miso soup, rice, Japanese pickles, and a vegetable. More expensive Kobe beef is also available, with the least expensive fixed-price dinner offering Kobe sirloin costing ¥3,980 (\$33).

1–8–2 Kitanagasa Dori. ☎ 078/332-1787. Steaks ¥1,580–¥5,580 (\$13–\$47); set steak dinner ¥2,480–¥6,780 (\$21–\$57); set lunch ¥950–¥2,980 (\$7.90–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm (last order). Station: Sannomiya (2 min.). On the north side of Sankita, the street that runs along the north side of Hankyu Sannomiya Station, diagonally across from McDonald's; look for the sign with the plaid ribbon.

INEXPENSIVE

142 Hyotan *Value* GYOZA Roll up your sleeves and join the working class at this hole-in-the-wall eatery underneath the tracks of Hanshin Sannomiya Station. It must be doing something right, since it's been selling nothing but gyoza for more than 40 years, favored for the light texture of its dumpling skin and stuffed with minced pork, leek, and cabbage. At your table will be soy sauce, vinegar, and chile sauce, which you should mix in the little bowl provided; gyoza come eight to a serving. Avoid the noon-time rush, when this tiny place is like an assembly line for speed eating.

1–31–37 Kitanagasadori. ☎ 078/331-1354. Gyoza ¥370 (\$3.10). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–10pm (last order). Closed the 2nd and 4th Sun of each month. Station: Sannomiya (2 min.). Underneath the tracks of Hanshin Sannomiya Station in a small passageway at the west end; look for the red curtains.

Masaya Honten NOODLES This well-known noodle restaurant has been dishing out noodles for more than 50 years but was recently remodeled. Since the menu is in Japanese only, make your choice from the indoor display case before sitting down. Dishes include tempura with noodles (*tempura soba*) and pork cutlet with noodles (*tonkatsu soba*).

1–8–21 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/331-4178. Dishes ¥700–¥1,300 (\$5.50–\$11). No credit cards. Daily 11am–midnight. Station: Sannomiya (2 min.). North of Sannomiya Station on the left side of Kitano-zaka. Look for the water wheel and plastic-food display case.

Nishimura COFFEE SHOP In business for some 50 years, Nishimura is a Kobe landmark. It's on the north side of Yamate Kansen Dori (also called Nakayamate Dori), across from Higashimon Street, but if you can't find it, just follow your nose; the smell of roasting coffee broadcasts its location. At least 10 types of coffee are available, as well as snacks and desserts.

1–26–1 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/221-1872. Coffee from ¥450 (\$3.75). No credit cards. Daily 8:30am–11pm. Station: Sannomiya (10 min.).

Old Spaghetti Factory (Kids Value SPAGHETTI A branch of a U.S. chain founded in Portland in 1969, the Old Spaghetti Factory gets kudos for its renovation of an 1898 warehouse in Harborland next to Mosaic, complete with antiques and an airy setting. It offers inexpensive spaghetti with a choice of more than a dozen sauces, from the usual meat sauce to sautéed bacon and spinach. Set lunches (spaghetti, soup or salad, drink, and bread) are available on weekdays. Set dinners let you compose your meal according to appetite, adding just bread and a drink to your pasta or going all out with an appetizer, bread, soup or salad, drink, and dessert. A kids' menu is also available.

Harborland, 1-5-5 Higashi Kawasaki-cho. ☎ 078/360-3911. Set lunch ¥680-¥1,080 (\$5.65-\$9); set dinner ¥800-¥1,880 (\$6.65-\$16). MC, V. Mon-Fri 11am-2:30pm and 5-10pm; Sat-Sun 11am-10pm (last order). Loop Line bus: Harborland. Station: Kobe (8 min.). From JR Kobe Station, take the C exit of DuoKobe and walk straight down Kobe Gas Light St. past Hankyu, following signs for BRICK WAREHOUSE RESTAURANT until you see the brick warehouse on your right.

Pinocchio PIZZA/PASTA This small and cozy corner establishment opened in 1962 and proudly claims to have never fallen victim to the many fads that have come and gone since then. Instead, it still produces handmade pizza, which you can order from the menu or can create yourself by ordering the basic pizza for ¥800 (\$6.65) and adding ingredients like garlic, asparagus, mushroom, pineapple, chicken, or bacon, all priced at ¥100 (85¢) each. Pasta, pilaf, and gratin are also available.

2-3-13 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/331-3330. Pizza and pasta ¥1,000-¥1,500 (\$8.35-\$13). DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am-midnight. Station: Sannomiya (12 min.). On the south side of Yamate Kansen Dori (also called Nakayamate Dori), west of Ikuta Shrine.

KOBE AFTER DARK

Kobe has a wide selection of English-style pubs, bars, ex-patriate hangouts, and nightclubs. All the establishments below are easily accessible to foreigners, and most are within walking distance of Sannomiya Station.

THE CLUB & MUSIC SCENE

Chicken George This place is one of Kobe's most popular for 20-somethings in search of well-known Japanese music acts, including pop, jazz, and alternative. It's easy to spot with its grungy, graffiti-filled exterior; the inside is dark and cavernous. Though there's table seating for more mellow acts, sold-out sets mean everyone stands. Check *Kansai Time Out* for concert listings. Open daily 6 or 6:30 to 10pm. 2-17-15 Shimo-Yamate Dori. ☎ 078/392-0146. www.chicken-george.co.jp. Cover ¥2,500-¥6,000 (\$21-\$50). Station: Sannomiya (5 min.). Just west of Ikuta Shrine.

Garage Paradise Candlelight, gauzy curtains draped from the high ceiling, Roman statues, a copper and stone bar, and stone walls set the scene at this basement with five sets of good, live music Friday through Sunday nights and DJs the rest of the week. The interesting setting attracts the local foreigner clientele. Open daily 6pm to 4am (Sun and holidays to 2am). Kobe Yamashita Building, basement, 1-13-7 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/391-6640. Cover Fri-Sun only ¥500 (\$4.15). Station: Sannomiya (10 min.). On Yamate Kansen Dori east of Higashimon, catty-corner from Nishimura coffee shop.

Satin Doll This traditional jazz club, in the same building as Gaylord (see "Where to Dine," above), first opened in 1972 and remains one of the city's top venues. Its sophisticated interior offers table and bar seating with some city views. There are three live music sets nightly (7, 8:30, and 10pm), an English-language menu offering mainly snacks, and a wine list. **Note:** A 10% service charge will be added to your bill. Open daily 6pm to midnight. Bacchus Building, 1-26-1 Nakayama Dori. ☎ 078/242-0100. Cover from ¥500 (\$4.15), more for international acts,

plus ¥500 (\$4.15) table charge. Station: Sannomiya (10 min.). On Yamate Kansen Dori opposite Higashimon Dori.

Sone Kobe's oldest and best-known jazz club has changed little since its 1969 opening, offering the same traditional jazz, including Dixieland ensembles and piano-vocalist duos, in a clubby, dated atmosphere. There are four stages nightly, and most people come to eat; the Japanese menu lists pasta, pizza, fish, and Kobe steaks, with set meals starting at ¥2,000 (\$17). Open daily 5pm to 12:30am (Sun to midnight). 1–24–10 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/221-2055. Cover usually ¥700 (\$5.85). Station: Sannomiya (5 min.). North of the station on the left side of Kitano-zaka.

THE BAR SCENE

Ryan's Irish Pub Alan Ryan is the ever-present owner and host at this very popular ex-patriate bar, the only Irish-owned pub in Kansai. Tuesday through Sunday features live music—everything from blues, country-and-western, and Irish—for which there's never a cover charge. There's Guinness on tap and food items like Irish stew and fish and chips to wash it all down. A good place to relax after a hard day of sightseeing; happy hour is till 8pm. Open daily 5pm to midnight (Fri to 1am, Sat to 2am). Kondo Building, 7th floor, 4–3–2 Kano-cho. ☎ 078/391-6902. Station: Sannomiya (1 min.). Across the north side of Sannomiya Station on the corner of Ikuta Shinmichi St. and Flower Rd., above a McDonald's.

Second Chance This all-nighter, in business an astonishing 28 years (which makes it older than most of its customers), is a small, one-room bar favored by night owls who don't mind the rather sparse furnishings with Hawaiian touches. Decorated with surfboards and mock thatched roofs, it's where people congregate when the other bars have had the good sense to close down for the night. Open daily 6pm to 5am. Takashima Building, 2nd floor, 2–1–12 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/391-3544. Station: Sannomiya (10 min.). On Yamate Kansen Dori west of Higashimon and catty-corner from Nishimura coffee shop.

Smoke This place is one of a kind—a tiny bar with only eight seats at the counter, all under the watchful eye of 80-something bartender Kamogawa-san, who worked at several hotels (he even served Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio at the old Kobe Oriental Hotel) before opening his own bar in 1955. Now the oldest bar in Kobe, it's filled with memorabilia of a lifetime, and if you ask, Kamogawa-san will drag out his photographs of actors, actresses, comedians, baseball players, sumo wrestlers, and politicians who have sat here. He's also likely to show you a few of his magic tricks when he's not busy changing records on his old player. There's no cover or table charge, but the average bill is about ¥4,000 (\$33). (There are never prices posted in these kinds of bars and there are no menus; most customers are regulars and they don't come just for one drink—they come for the evening. The price above includes snacks like nuts and whatever other dishes are offered that day.) Since this place is tiny, even regular clientele often call to reserve a seat. Open Monday to Saturday 5 to 11:30pm. 1–9–1 Nakayamate Dori. ☎ 078/391-0257. Station: Sannomiya (4 min.). North of the station on the left side of Kitano-zaka.

Starlight Lounge For cocktails with a view, head to this sophisticated lounge on the 35th floor of Hotel Okura Kobe in Meriken Park, with two-tiered seating for optimal views. **Note:** No children are allowed after 5pm, and on Saturday nights there's live music, for which there's a ¥1,000 (\$8.35) charge. Open Monday to Friday 5pm to midnight and Saturday and Sunday from 1pm to midnight. 2–1 Hatoba-cho. ☎ 078/333-3521. Station: Motomachi (10 min. south). Loop Line bus: Meriken Park (1 min.).

6 The Temples of Mount Koya ★★

730km (465 miles) W of Tokyo; 199km (124 miles) S of Osaka

If you've harbored visions of wooden temples nestled in among trees whenever you've thought of Japan, the sacred mountain of **Mount Koya** is the place to go. It's all here—head-shaven monks, religious chanting at the crack of dawn, the wafting of incense, temples, towering cypress trees, tombs, and early-morning mist rising above the treetops. Mount Koya—called Koyasan by the Japanese—is one of Japan's most sacred places and the mecca of the Shingon Esoteric sect of Buddhism. Standing almost 900m (3,000 ft.) above the world, the top of Mount Koya is home to more than 115 Shingon Buddhist temples scattered through the mountain forests. Some 50 of these temples offer accommodations, making this one of the best places in Japan to observe temple life firsthand.

Koyasan became a place of meditation and religious learning more than 1,180 years ago when Kukai, known posthumously as Kobo Daishi, was granted the mountaintop by the imperial court in 816 as a place to establish his Shingon sect of Buddhism. Kobo Daishi was a charismatic priest who had spent 2 years in China studying Esoteric Buddhism before returning to his native land to spread his teachings among the Japanese. Revered for his excellent calligraphy, his humanitarianism, and his teachings, Kobo Daishi remains one of the most beloved figures in Japanese Buddhist history. When he died in the 9th century, he was laid to rest in a mausoleum on Mount Koya. His followers believe Kobo Daishi is not dead but simply in a deep state of meditation, awaiting the arrival of the last bodhisattva (Buddha messiah). According to popular belief, priests opening his mausoleum decades after his death found his body still warm.

Through the centuries, many of Kobo Daishi's followers, wishing to be close at hand when the great priest awakens, have had huge tombs or tablets constructed close to Kobo Daishi's mausoleum, and many have had their ashes interred here. Pilgrims over the last thousand years have included emperors, feudal lords, samurai, and common people, all climbing to the top of the mountain to pay their respects. Women, however, were barred from entering the sacred grounds of Koyasan until 1872.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The easiest way to get to Koyasan is from Osaka. Ordinary express (*kyuko*) trains of the **Nankai Line** depart from Osaka's Namba Station every half-hour bound for Gokurakubashi, and the trip south takes about 1 hour and 40 minutes. If you want to ride in luxury, use one of the limited-express cars with reserved seats that take about 1 hour and 20 minutes. After arriving at the last stop, Gokurakubashi, you continue your trip to the top of Mount Koya via a 5-minute ride in a cable car. The entire journey from Namba Station to Mount Koya costs ¥1,230 (\$10) one-way, including the cable car; if you take the faster limited express, it'll cost ¥760 (\$6.35) extra.

VISITOR INFORMATION At the top of Mount Koya is Koyasan Station, where you'll find a booth of the local tourist office, the main office of which is located approximately in the center of Koyasan village near Kongobuji Temple. You can pick up a map of Koyasan and book a room in a temple at either office, but it is recommended that you fax ahead for a reservation (see "Where to Stay," below). Both offices are open daily from 8:30am to 4:30pm in winter (Nov–Feb), to 5pm the rest of the year. For more information, contact the **Koyasan Tourist Association** at ☎ 0736/56-2616.

GETTING AROUND Outside the cable car station, you must board a **bus** that travels 2km (1¼ miles) along a narrow, winding road to the village of Koyasan and then continues along the main street all the way through town to the Okunoin-mae or Ichinohashi (also called Ichinohashi-guchi) bus stop, the location of Kobo Daishi's mausoleum. The bus passes almost all the sights along the way, as well as most temples accommodating visitors and the Koyasan Tourist Association's main office. Buses depart every 30 minutes between 6:20am and 7:42pm, and the trip to Okunoin-mae takes 20 minutes and costs ¥400 (\$3.35). Otherwise, once you're settled in at your temple accommodations, you can probably walk to Okunoin and other locations mentioned below, but day-long bus passes, called Free Passes, are available for ¥800 (\$6.65).

EXPLORING MOUNT KOYA

THE TOP ATTRACTION The most awe-inspiring and magnificent of Koyasan's many structures and temples, **Okunoin** (★★★) contains the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi. The most dramatic way to approach Okunoin is from the Ichinohashi bus stop, where a pathway leads 1.6km (1 mile) to the mausoleum. Swathed in a respectful darkness of huge cypress trees forming a canopy overhead are monument after monument, tomb after tomb—approximately 200,000 of them, all belonging to faithful followers from past centuries.

I don't know whether being here will affect you the same way, but I was awestruck by the sheer density of tombstones, the iridescent green moss, the shafts of light streaking through the treetops, the stone lanterns, and the gnarled bark of the old cypress trees. Together, they present a dramatic picture representing a thousand years of Japanese Buddhist history. If you're lucky, you won't meet many people along this pathway. Tour buses fortunately park at a newer entrance to the mausoleum at the bus stop called Okunoin-mae. I absolutely forbid you to take this newer and shorter route; its crowds lessen the impact of this place considerably. Rather, make sure you take the path farthest to the left, which begins near the Ichinohashi stop. Much less traveled, it's also much more impressive and is one of the main reasons for coming to Koyasan in the first place. And be sure to return to the mausoleum at night—the stone lanterns (now lit electrically) create a mysterious and powerful effect.

At the end of the pathway, about a 30-minute walk away is the **Lantern Hall**, or **Torodo**, which houses about 21,000 lanterns, donated by prime ministers, emperors, and others. If you'd like to buy a lantern to dedicate to someone, it costs ¥500,000 to ¥1,000,000 (\$4,166–\$8,333). Two sacred fires, which reportedly have been burning since the 11th century, are kept safely inside. The mausoleum itself is behind the Lantern Hall. Buy a white candle, light it, and wish for anything you want. Then sit back and watch respectfully as Buddhists come to chant and pay respects to one of Japan's greatest Buddhist leaders.

MORE TO SEE & DO ⁽¹⁴³⁾ **Kongobuji Temple** (★★), located near the main Koyasan Tourist Association office in the center of town (☎ 0736/56-2011; open daily 8:30am–4:30pm), is the central monastery headquarters of the Shingon sect in Japan. Although Kongobuji was originally built in the 16th century by Toyotomi Hideyoshi to commemorate his mother's death, the present building is 150 years old, reconstructed following a fire. The most important thing to see, however, is the temple's magnificent rock garden, reputedly the largest in Japan and said to represent a pair of dragons in a sea of clouds. If it's raining, consider yourself lucky—the wetness adds sheen and color to the rocks. Admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for children.

Another important site is the **Danjo-Garan Complex** ★ (☎ 0736/56-3215; open daily 8:30am–4:30pm), the first buildings constructed on Koyasan and still considered the center of religious life in the community. It's an impressive sight with a huge main hall (*kondo*); a large vermilion-colored pagoda (*daito*), which many consider to be Koyasan's most magnificent structure and which is very much worth entering (¥200/\$1.65); and the oldest building on Mount Koya, the Fudodo, which was built in 1197. Next to the complex is the (144) **Reihokan Museum** (☎ 0736/56-2029; open daily 8:30am–4:30pm), displaying such treasures of Koyasan as wooden Buddha sculptures, scrolls, art, and implements spread through two buildings. Unfortunately, there are no English explanations, so come here only if you have 30 minutes to spare. Admission is ¥600 (\$5) for adults, ¥350 (\$2.90) for students, and ¥250 (\$2.10) for children.

WHERE TO STAY

Although this community of 4,000 residents has the usual stores, schools, and offices of any small town, there are no hotels here—the only place you can stay is at a temple, and I strongly urge you to do so.

Japanese who come here have almost always made reservations beforehand, and you should do the same. You can make reservations by calling the temple directly or through travel agencies such as JTB. You can also make reservations upon arrival in Koyasan at either Tourist Association office (see “Essentials,” above); I suggest faxing in advance to be sure you can get a space (fax 0736/56-2889), especially during peak travel seasons.

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO STAY AT A KOYASAN TEMPLE Prices for an overnight stay in one of the temples, including two vegetarian meals, range from ¥9,000 to ¥15,000 (\$75–\$125) per person, depending on the room. Tax is extra, and you should bring your own towel and toiletries. Check-in is around 3pm; checkout is at 10am.

Your room will be tatami and may include a nice view of a garden. High-school and college students attending Koyasan's Buddhist university live at the temple; they'll bring your meals to your room, make up your futon, and clean your room. The Buddhist vegetarian meals served (*shojin ryori*) are generally quite good, and since Buddhist monks are vegetarians but not teetotalers (beer and sake are made of rice and grain), alcoholic drinks are readily available at the temples for an extra charge. The morning religious service is at 6am; you don't have to attend, but I strongly recommend that you do. There's something uplifting about early-morning meditative chanting, even for nonbelievers. Both baths and toilets are communal, and meals are at set times. Because the students must leave for school, breakfast is usually served by 7:30am.

Below are just a few of the dozens of area temples open to overnight guests. They're all located very near the indicated bus stop. All of them have public baths, but none offer rooms with bathrooms.

(145) **Eko-in** ★ This 100-year-old temple, with origins stretching back almost 1,200 years when Kukai was said to have erected a stupa on this site, has nice grounds and is nestled in a wooded slope. For centuries it enjoyed support of the Shimazu clan of southern Kyushu. It's known for its excellent Buddhist cuisine, and the master priest will give zazen meditation lessons if his schedule permits. More than half the rooms have TVs and telephones; most also have nice sitting alcoves. There's always someone here who speaks a little English. Reservations should be made in advance, especially for peak season.

Koyasan 497, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama-ken 648-0211. ☎ 0736/56-2514. Fax 0736/56-2891. ekoin@mbox.co.jp. 36 units (none with bathroom). ¥9,000–¥12,000 (\$75–\$100) per person. Rates include 2 meals. V. Bus: Karukaya-do or Ichinohashi. *In room:* TV (some rooms), hot-water pot with tea, no phone in some rooms.

(146) Fudoin Temple Founded in 906, this temple's oldest existing building is 400 years old. Rooms, in new, modern buildings, look out on a garden and a carp pond. The young head priest speaks English and offers towels and yukata to foreigners.

Koyasan, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama-ken 648-0211. ☎ 0736/56-2414. Fax 0736/56-4700. 20 units (none with bathroom). ¥10,000–¥15,000 (\$83–\$125) per person. Rates include 2 meals. No credit cards. Bus: Rengedani. *In room:* TV (most rooms), hot-water pot with tea, safe, no phone.

(147) Rengejoin Temple ★★ This temple's head priest speaks English, so a lot of foreigners are directed here—it's a good place to meet people and to find out about Buddhism. It's also one of the few temples that may take you in without a reservation. Established 900 years ago, it was rebuilt 150 years ago after a fire. Rooms have views of a nice garden with a pond; a plus are the English videos placed in rooms that explore the history and significance of Mount Koya and Kongobuji Temple. The disadvantage is that it's on the opposite end of town from Okunoin, about a 50-minute walk away.

Koyasan 700, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama-ken 648-0211. ☎ 0736/56-2233. Fax 0736/56-4743. 48 units (none with bathroom). ¥9,000–¥15,000 (\$75–\$125) per person. Rates include 2 meals. No credit cards. Bus: Ishinguchi stop. *In room:* TV, VCR, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

(148) Shojoshinin ★★ This temple has a great location at the beginning of the tomb-lined pathway to Okunoin, making it convenient for your late-night stroll to the mausoleum. Originating as a thatched hut built by Kukai more than 1,150 years ago and once the second-largest temple in Koyasan after Kongobuji, today it boasts attractive 150-year-old buildings, including a large wooden structure with rooms overlooking a small garden and pond. It's usually full in August and peak seasons, so make reservations early.

Koyasan 566, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama-ken 648-0211. ☎ 0736/56-2006. Fax 0736/56-4770. 20 units (none with bathroom). ¥9,000–¥12,000 (\$75–\$100) per person. Rates include 2 meals. No credit cards. Bus: Ichinohashi. *In room:* TV (most rooms), hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

(149) Tentokuin The rooms of this temple, which dates from 1622, are located in a new annex. Most look out onto the garden, which in the 1930s was described as one of the most beautiful places in Japan. With a natural mountain background, the garden is of the “borrowed landscaping” type and retains its layout design dating from the Momoyama Period. Rates depend on room size and garden view. No English is spoken.

Koyasan 370, Koya-cho, Ito-gun, Wakayama-ken 648-0211. ☎ 0736/56-2714. Fax 0736/56-4725. 55 units (none with bathroom). ¥8,000–¥15,000 (\$67–\$125) per person. Rates include 2 meals. AE, V. Bus: Honzan-mae or Senjuin-bashi. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

7 Himeji, a Castle Town ★

640km (400 miles) W of Tokyo; 130km (81 miles) W of Kyoto; 87km (54 miles) E of Okayama

The main reason tourists come to Himeji, in Hyogo Prefecture, is to see its 400-year-old beautiful **castle**, which embodies better than any other castle the best in Japan's military architecture. If you were to see only one castle in Japan, this is my pick.

Because of the castle's close proximity to Himeji Station, many tourists stop only long enough to see the castle and a few other sites before continuing their

journey onward by Shinkansen train. I've included a few recommendations, however, for those wishing to make an overnight stop.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE A stop on the **Tokaido/Sanyo Shinkansen** bullet train, which runs between Tokyo and Kyushu, Himeji is about 3½ hours from Tokyo, 1 hour from Kyoto, and a half-hour from Okayama. The fare from Tokyo is ¥14,700 (\$123) for a non-reserved seat. **Note:** Not all bullet trains stop in Himeji, so make sure yours does.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Himeji City Tourist Information Center** (☎ 0792/85-3792) is located at the central exit of the station's north (castle) side, to the left after you exit from the ticket gate. It's open daily from 9am to 5pm, but foreigners are asked to visit the center between 10am and 3pm when an English-speaking volunteer is on hand to answer questions. Some tourist information is also available online at www.city.himeji.hyogo.jp.

If you're stopping in Himeji only for a few hours to see the castle, deposit your luggage in the coin lockers just beside the tourist office or underneath the Shinkansen tracks.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND You can **walk** to Himeji's attractions. The main road in town is Otemae Dori, a wide boulevard that stretches from Himeji Station north to Himeji Castle (you can walk the distance in about 15 min.). To the east (right) of Otemae Dori are two parallel streets, Miyukidori and Omizusujii, both covered shopping arcades. If you want, you can use a **bicycle** free of charge from 9am to 6pm. Just fill out an application form (before 4pm) at the station's tourist information counter and then exchange the ticket for a bicycle in front of the station or midway to the castle on Otemae Dori. Finally, red-painted **tourist buses** make runs on weekends and holidays from Himeji Station to the castle and beyond and cost ¥100 (85¢) per ride.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Himeji Castle ★★ As soon as you exit from Himeji Station, you'll see Himeji Castle straight ahead at the end of a wide boulevard called Otemae Dori. Perhaps the most beautiful castle in all of Japan, Himeji Castle is nicknamed "White Heron Castle" in reference to its white walls, which stretch out on either side of the main donjon and resemble a white heron poised in flight over the plain. Whether it looks to you like a heron or a castle, the view of the white five-story donjon under a blue sky is striking, especially when the area's many cherry trees are in bloom. This is also one of the few castles in Japan that has remained virtually undamaged since its completion in 1618, surviving even the World War II bombings that laid Himeji city in ruins. In 1993 it was declared a World Cultural Heritage Site.

Originating as a fort in the 14th century, Himeji Castle took a more majestic form in 1581 when a three-story donjon was built by Toyotomi Hideyoshi during one of his military campaigns in the district. In the early 1600s, the castle became the residence of Ikeda Terumasa, one of Hideyoshi's generals and a son-in-law of Tokugawa Ieyasu. He remodeled the castle into its present five-story structure. With its extensive gates, three moats, turrets, and a secret entrance, it had one of the most sophisticated defense systems in Japan. The maze of passageways leading to the donjon was so complicated that intruders would find themselves trapped in dead ends. The castle walls were constructed with square or circular holes through which gun muzzles could poke; the rectangular holes

were for archers. There were also drop chutes where stones or boiling water could be dumped on enemies trying to scale the walls.

On weekends (and occasionally on weekdays), volunteer guides usually hang around the castle ticket office and are willing to give you a guided tour of the castle for free. It gives them an opportunity to practice their English while you learn about the history of the castle and even old castle gossip. But even if you go on your own, you won't have any problems learning about the history of the castle since the city of Himeji has done a fine job of placing English explanations throughout the castle grounds. With or without a guide, you'll spend at least 2 hours here. **Tip:** A combination ticket, allowing discounted admission to both the castle and Koko-en (see below) is available at either entrance.

68 Honmachi. ☎ 0792/85-1146. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Combination ticket to both Himeji Castle and Koko-en ¥720 (\$6) adults, ¥280 (\$2.35) children. Summer daily 9am–6pm; winter daily 9am–5pm. You must enter 1 hr. before closing time. A 15-min. walk straight north of Himeji Station via Otemae Dori.

①50 **Koko-en** ★★ *Finds* Although laid out only in 1992, this is a wonderful garden, occupying land where samurai mansions once stood at the base of Himeji Castle, about a 5-minute walk away. Actually it's composed of nine separate small gardens, each one different and enclosed by traditional walls, with lots of rest areas to soak in the wonderful views. The gardens, typical of those in the Edo Period, include a garden of deciduous trees, a garden of pine trees, a garden of flowers popular during the Edo Period, tea-ceremony gardens, and traditional Japanese gardens with ponds, waterfalls, and running streams. If you wish, relax at the Souju-an teahouse (¥500/\$4.15 for tea and a sweet; open 10am–4pm) or dine at a restaurant overlooking a carp pond (see “Where to Dine,” below). In any case, I wouldn't miss this special place. If you don't stop (but how could you resist?), you can stroll through all the gardens in about 45 minutes.

68 Honmachi. ☎ 0792/89-4120. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Combination ticket to both Himeji Castle and Koko-en ¥720 (\$6) adults, ¥280 (\$2.35) children. Daily 9am–5pm (to 6pm June–Aug). A 15-min. walk north of Himeji Station; turn left in front of Himeji Castle (the entrance will be on your right).

A PILGRIMAGE TO MOUNT SHOSHA & ENGYOJI TEMPLE

If you're staying overnight, you might consider a half-day trip to **Mount Shosha** (called Shoshazan in Japanese; ☎ 0792/66-3327), the 360m (1,200-ft.) high mountain retreat of Engyoji Temple, founded 1,000 years ago by a holy man who received enlightenment from the God of Wisdom and Intellect. Since then, Japanese have flocked to the mountain to seek purification of both body and spirit. Many make it a fun day's outing as well, bringing obento lunch boxes with them to enjoy under the wooded trees. I recommend this 3- to 4-hour excursion mainly for the lovely hike. The temple buildings spread along the mountaintop are a bonus.

To reach Shoshazan, take bus no. 6 or 8 from in front of Himeji Station or Himeji Castle 25 minutes to the last stop (fare: ¥260/\$2.15). From there, board a ropeway (cable car) that departs every 15 minutes and costs ¥900 (\$7.50) round-trip (half price for children). Make sure to check when the last ropeway departs the mountain (5pm in winter; 6 or 7pm in summer). After paying an admission of ¥300 (\$2.50) for admission to temple grounds (children get in free), you'll walk 20 minutes to reach the Maniden, the main temple building. An impressive, cliff-side wooden structure dedicated to the Goddess of Mercy, it was first constructed in 970, burned to the ground almost 1,000 years later, and was reconstructed in

1932. Other highlights among the many other structures spread along the mountaintop are the Jikido, a former dormitory for priests-in-training, and the five mausolea of the Honda clan, rulers of Himeji Castle in the 17th century.

WHERE TO STAY EXPENSIVE

Hotel Sungarden ★ This large, conspicuous hotel is considered Himeji's best. I think it lacks personality and charm, but its location (only a 1-min. walk from Himeji Station's Shinkansen side) is a definite plus, as are its many restaurants and its health club. In addition, some of its single and double rooms offer views of the castle; ask for a room on a higher floor facing north. Note, however, that it's popular with international tour groups and enjoys a high 85% occupancy rate.

100 Minami-ekimai-cho, Himeji 670-0962. ☎ 0792/22-2231. Fax 0792/24-3731. 258 units. ¥9,000–¥13,000 (\$75–\$108) single; ¥17,000–¥19,500 (\$142–\$163) twin; ¥17,000 (\$142) double. AE, DC, MC, V. A 1-min. walk from the south (Shinkansen) exit of Himeji Station. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (2 Japanese, 1 Chinese, 1 Western); bar; lounge; health club with 20m (66-ft.) indoor lane pool, sauna, whirlpool, and exercise room (fee: ¥3,000/\$25); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite bilingual TV w/pay movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Claire Higasa This hotel is a good bet. Although distinctly a business hotel with its 50 single rooms, coin-operated fax and photocopy machine in the lobby, and soda and noodle vending machines, several pluses—like soothing music and flower arrangements in the lobby and an accommodating, English-speaking staff—take it out of the ordinary. Ask for a room with castle view on the sixth or seventh floor for the same price. The bathrooms are tiny and the shower/sink combination faucet a bit mind-boggling for the technically challenged, but who cares when the large seventh-floor public baths with Jacuzzi jets have castle views? Note that there's a 1am curfew.

22 Jyunishomae-cho, Himeji 670-0911. ☎ 0792/24-3421. Fax 0792/89-3729. higasa@skyblue.ocn.ne.jp. 60 units. ¥6,030–¥7,000 (\$50–\$58) single; ¥13,000 (\$108) twin; ¥14,000 (\$117) double. MC, V. Station: Himeji (north exit, 5 min.). Walk north on Otemae-Dori and take the 1st left after Jyunishomae-cho (a large, one-way street with a traffic light); it's 4 short blocks farther, on the left across from a small park. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free English-language movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet (except in the cheapest singles).

Himeji Washington Hotel Plaza The Washington is part of a chain of business hotels. Some of the staff speak a little English, and everyone is extremely helpful. Rooms are tiny but cheerful, with windows that open (though some face another building), panels that close for complete darkness, and slippers that, so the hotel claims, are washed after every guests' use (my goodness, what do the other hotels do?). The lobby is on the second floor.

Higashi Ekimae-cho 98, Himeji 670-0926. ☎ 0792/25-0111. Fax 0792/25-0133. 149 units. ¥6,754–¥7,707 (\$56–\$64) single; ¥13,508 (\$113) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. A 5-min. walk from Himeji Station's north exit. Walk north from the station on Otemae Dori; turn right at the 1st large street, Junishomae (a one-way street with a traffic light) and walk past 2 covered shopping arcades and Starbucks; it will be on the left. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

Hotel Himeji Plaza This business hotel on the south side of the station is a bit dingy, but the staff is friendly and courteous and the price is right. There are

mostly singles and twins, most with single-size beds. Note, too, that some twins have no windows: Dracula wouldn't have minded, but you might. Best are the four doubles, recently renovated and a bit more up to date. The higher-priced twins and doubles have empty fridges you can stock them yourself; singles with bathrooms have them, too.

158 Toyozawa-cho, Himeji 670-0964. ☎ 0792/81-9000. Fax 0792/84-3549. h-plaza@memenet.or.jp. 213 units (50 with toilet only, 158 with bathroom). ¥5,900–¥6,000 (\$49–\$50) single without bathroom; ¥7,200–¥7,400 (\$60–\$62) single with bathroom; ¥12,300–¥13,800 (\$103–\$115) twin with bathroom; ¥12,300 (\$103) double with bathroom. Rates include tax and service. AE, DC, MC, V. A 1-min. walk from the south (Shinkansen) exit of Himeji Station, behind Sungarden Hotel. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western); lounge; sauna (free for hotel guests); in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge (some rooms), hot-water pot (except in cheapest singles).

WHERE TO DINE

Just east of Otemae Dori, the main drag from Himeji Station to the castle, is a parallel street called **Miyukidori**, a covered shopping arcade with lots of restaurants and coffee shops.

In the listings below, directions are from Himeji Station.

①51 **Asaka Sushi** SUSHI This is sushi Himeji-style—you order by the plate, and then, using cups of sauce and brushes at your table, you brush on your sauce yourself. There's no menu, but there's a display case outside. The *nigiri* will give you one sushi each of octopus, squid, shrimp, tuna, and whitefish; the *anago* is five pieces of grilled conger eel on rice; the *tekka* is eight pieces of tuna and rice rolled in nori seaweed. Each plate costs ¥400 (\$3.35).

106 Shiroganemachi. ☎ 0792/22-3835. Sushi ¥400 (\$3.35) a plate. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 10:30am–6pm. Walk north on Otemae Dori until you come to the 1st one-way street with a traffic light (Junishomae); turn left and then right. It'll be on your left (5 min.).

Coo's Italian PASTA If you hunger for something other than Japanese food, this casual eatery will do in a pinch. It has a convenient location on the main road between Himeji Station and the castle; choose a window seat for a view of the busy intersection. Unfortunately, the menu is only in Japanese and the food is mediocre. If you stick to the basics—spaghetti with meat sauce—you'll probably do okay.

65 Minamimachi. ☎ 0792/89-4815. Main dishes ¥800–¥1,400 (\$6.65–\$12); set meals from ¥800 (\$6.65). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–8pm. Walk north on Otemae Dori to the 1st major street, Junishomae; it's on the corner to the left (3 min.).

①52 **Fukutei** ★★ VARIED JAPANESE This sophisticated restaurant with a simple but elegant interior and soothing Japanese instrumental music playing in the background is a popular refuge for shoppers from the nearby Miyukidori shopping arcade. It offers a wide variety of Japanese food, including sashimi, tempura, noodles, eel, and sushi. A great deal is the hearty *teishoku* *ontento* (¥1,400/\$12) served until 3pm. It usually includes sashimi, tempura, soup, rice, and pickled vegetables. There's also a mini-*kaiseki* available at lunch (¥1,400/\$12) and dinner (¥2,500/\$21). Fish swim in a black-marble pool in the center of the restaurant until their number comes up.

75 Kameimachi. ☎ 0792/23-0981. Set lunch ¥1,400–¥2,000 (\$12–\$17); set dinner ¥2,000–¥8,000 (\$17–\$67). V. Fri–Wed 11am–3pm and 4:30–9:30pm. Walk north on Otemae Dori and take the 1st right after Junishomae (a large, one-way street with a traffic light); it's on your left just past Miyukidori (5 min.).

①53 **Kassui-ken** ★ EEL/NOODLES This charmless restaurant would not have much to recommend it except for one overwhelming feature: It overlooks a waterfall and koi pond in lovely Koko-en Garden. It's certainly the most picturesque

place in town to try Himeji's specialty, conger eel. If that's too exotic, however, it also serves a few noodle dishes, spaghetti, curry rice, and fried rice. Or you can stop just for a refreshing drink of beer, soda, or coffee; but avoid the busy lunchtime crowd.

Koko-en-nai, 68 Honmachi. ☎ **0792/89-4131**. Main dishes ¥800–¥1,000 (\$6.65–\$8.35); set meal ¥1,500–¥2,000 (\$13–\$17). No credit cards. Daily 9:30am–4:30pm (10am–5:30pm June–Aug). Inside Koko-en (see “Seeing the Sights,” above, for directions).

8 Okayama: Gateway to Shikoku

733km (455 miles) W of Tokyo; 218km (136 miles) W of Kyoto; 160km (100 miles) E of Hiroshima

Okayama is a major gateway to the island of Shikoku (see chapter 9), thanks to the Seto Ohashi Bridge, which measures almost 9.5km (6 miles) in length and connects Okayama Prefecture on Honshu island with Sakaide on Shikoku. Before the bridge was built in 1988, it took an hour by ferry to reach Shikoku, whereas traveling by train or car along the double-decker bridge cuts travel time down to just 15 minutes. Now there are two other bridges linking Honshu with Shikoku (one near Kobe and the other in Hiroshima Prefecture), but they're for vehicular travel only (no train service).

For those of you less interested in bridges, Okayama and its environs are important for other reasons as well. Okayama city, with a population of 1.9 million, boasts one of the most beautiful gardens in Japan. In nearby Kurashiki (see “Kurashiki, Market Town of Many Charms,” beginning on p. 438), a historic quarter ranks as one of the most picturesque neighborhoods in Japan. And scattered through Okayama Prefecture are so-called **International Villas**, built by the prefecture especially for foreigners and located primarily in rural areas, with amazingly low rates.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Okayama is a major stop on the **Shinkansen** Tokaido/Sanyo Line, about 4 hours from Tokyo, 1 hour and 15 minutes from Kyoto, and less than 1 hour from Hiroshima. The fare from Tokyo is ¥15,850 (\$132) for an unreserved seat.

Buses depart nightly from Shinjuku Station's west exit in Tokyo at 9:30 and 9:45pm, arriving at Okayama Station the next day at 7:50 and 8:05am respectively. The fare is ¥10,200 (\$85) one-way. For the same fare, you can depart from Tokyo's Shinagawa Station at 9:15pm and arrive at 7:35am. There's also express bus service from Osaka.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before you depart Tokyo, Kyoto, or Kansai or Narita international airports, stop by the Tourist Information Center for the leaflet “Okayama, Kurashiki and Seto Ohashi Bridge,” which contains useful information on train transportation to Okayama and important sights in the prefecture. In Okayama, the **Okayama City Tourist Information Office** (☎ **086/222-2912**; open daily 9am–6pm) is inside Okayama Station near the central exit of the east side (look for the sign displaying a question mark). The office is well-prepared for foreign visitors, supplying maps in English of Okayama and Kurashiki as well as brochures.

Just a 4-minute walk from Okayama Station is the **Okayama International Center**, 2–2–1 Hokancho (☎ **086/256-2000**; open Tues–Sun 9am–5pm), where you can get more detailed information, obtain a better map of Okayama than those available at the station, take classes, log onto the Internet, peruse a library book, and even stay overnight (see “Where to Stay,” below). Although

geared mainly toward foreign residents, classes that accept one-timers include instruction in tea ceremony, Japanese cooking, Japanese language, ikebana, and aikido. Check with the International Center for availability, times, and prices. The multilingual staff here is very helpful and is happy to steer you to Okayama Prefecture's International Villas, your hotel, or your next destination. To find the center, take the west exit of the station and turn right (north) onto the main street running in front of the station until you come to a 7-Eleven, where you should turn left; the center is the big building on your right. More information on Okayama Prefecture is available on the Internet at www.pref.okayama.jp.

INTERNET ACCESS You can check and send e-mail at the Okayama International Center (see "Visitor Information," above) free of charge, but you're limited to 30 minutes of usage. Be aware, too, that you may have to reserve the center's one computer in advance for busy times, or be prepared to wait.

GETTING AROUND Okayama's sights are all clustered within walking distance of each other, due east of Okayama Station. The easiest way to sightsee is to board a **streetcar** from Okayama Station's east side bound for Higashiyama (platform 1) and disembark about 8 minutes later at the Shiroshita streetcar stop (the 3rd stop; to your right will be the very noticeable Okayama Symphony Hall building). Pay the ¥100 (85¢) fare when you get off. From here you can continue walking straight ahead (east) 8 minutes to Okayama Castle and then visit nearby Korakuen Garden and the Yumeji Art Museum.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Korakuen Garden ★★☆☆ Okayama's claim to fame is this garden, considered one of Japan's three most beautiful landscaped gardens (the other two are in Kanazawa and Mito). Completed in 1700 by the Ikeda ruling clan after 14 years of work, its 11.2 hectares (28 acres) are graced with a pond, running streams, pine trees, plum and cherry trees, flowering bushes like azaleas and hydrangeas, bamboo groves, teahouses, and tea plantations. The surrounding hills, as well as Okayama's famous black castle, are incorporated into the garden's design. Its name, Korakuen, means "the garden for taking pleasure later," which has its origins in an old saying: "Bear sorrow before the people; take pleasure after them." This garden differs from most Japanese gardens in that it has large expanses of grassy open areas—the first Japanese garden to do so and still a rarity in crowded Japan. Other unusual features worth seeking out are the Ryuten, a wooden pavilion that straddles a stream where poem-composing parties were held (participants had to complete poems before a cup of sake floated by), and an enclosure of red-crested cranes. You can easily spend an hour here.

1–5 Korakuen. © 086/272-1148. Admission ¥350 (\$2.90) adults, ¥140 (\$1.15) children, free for seniors. Combination ticket to Okayama Castle and Korakuen Garden ¥520 (\$4.35) adults, ¥260 (\$2.15) children. Apr–Sept daily 7:30am–6pm; Oct–Mar daily 8am–5pm. Streetcar stop: Shiroshita (11 min.). Continue walking straight east and then turn left for the footbridge.

Okayama Castle Ⓐ *overrated* Originally built in the 16th century, Okayamajo was destroyed in World War II and rebuilt in 1966. Thanks to its black exterior, it has earned the nickname "Crow Castle"; it was painted black to contrast with neighboring Himeji's famous White Heron castle. Unlike castles of yore, an elevator whisks you up to the fourth floor of the donjon. The top floor affords a good view of the park and the city beyond, while the other floors contain a few swords, samurai outfits, lacquerware, and other Edo-Period items, most identified only in Japanese and quickly seen in 15 minutes or so. There's also a children's play area with old-fashioned toys, but probably the most rewarding thing

Kids Joypolis

If you have children in tow, you might want to temper Okayama's cultural offerings with some good old-fashioned fun at **Joypolis**, 2-10-1 Shimoishii (☎ 086/232-8790; open daily 10am-midnight), a chain of Japan's most sophisticated and largest video-game arcades. In addition to a toddler's play area, pachinko, video games, virtual horse races, and simulators (how good are you at skateboarding or racing cars?), there are 3-D motion rides and other amusements. Entry is free, with most attractions individually priced between ¥300 and ¥600 (\$2.50-\$5). With or without kids, it's worth at least visiting one of these eye-opening arcades while you're in Japan.

to do here is to try on a kimono and have someone snap a picture of you with your own camera. Donning costumes is free, but participants are limited to five hourly, accepted on the hour from 10am to 3pm (last suit-up). Frankly, if you've seen other Japanese castles, you might just want to photograph this one from the outside and move on. If you feel like indulging in a fairy-tale fantasy, you can rent paddleboats shaped like swans in the river below the castle (just be glad your neighbors aren't here to see you).

2-3-1 Marunouchi. ☎ 086/225-2096. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥120 (\$1) children. Combination ticket to Okayama Castle and Korakuen Garden ¥520 (\$4.35) adults, ¥260 (\$2.15) children. Special exhibits cost more. Daily 9am-5pm. Streetcar: Shiroshita stop (8 min.). Continue walking east; it will be on your right.

154 Yumeji Art Museum (Yumeji-Kyodo Bijutsukan) This museum, in a brick building topped by a cock weathervane just a few minutes' walk north of Korakuen, is dedicated to the works of Yumej Takehisa. Born in Okayama Prefecture in 1884, Yumeji is sometimes referred to as Japan's Toulouse-Lautrec and is credited with developing the fin de siècle Art Nouveau movement in Japan. This collection includes some of his most famous works, mostly in the Nihonga style of painting. Beautiful women were his favorite subjects. The one-room exhibition can be toured in about 15 minutes.

2-1-32 Hama. ☎ 086/271-1000. Admission ¥700 (\$5.85) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Tues-Sun 9am-5pm. Streetcar: Shiroshita stop (15 min.). Just north of Korakuen Park, a short walk across Horai-bashi Bridge.

SHOPPING

You can choose from a sampling of products and crafts made in Okayama Prefecture at the **155 Okayama Prefectural Product Center (Okayama-ken Kanko Bussan Sen-ta)**, 1-5-1 Omotecho (☎ 086/234-2270; open daily 10am-8pm, closed 2nd Tues each month), conveniently located beside (south of) the Shiroshita streetcar stop on the first floor of Okayama Symphony Hall (a round purple building). Bizen pottery (unglazed pottery with a history stretching back 1,000 years), rush-grass mats (*igusa*), wooden trays, spirits, papier-mâché toys, and more are all for sale here.

For general shopping, there's a large underground shopping arcade called **Ichibangai** at Okayama Station, with boutiques selling clothing, shoes, and accessories. Across from the station and connected to Ichibangai is **Takashimaya** department store. In the heart of the city, just south of Shiroshita streetcar stop, is the 1km (½-mile) **Omotecho** covered shopping arcade, where you'll find **Tenmaya**, Okayama's largest department store.

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE

Hotel Granvia Okayama ★★ Owned by the East JR Railway Group and offering a discount for holders of a Japan Rail Pass, this is Okayama's best hotel in terms of luxury and location. Although connected to Okayama Station and the Ichibangai shopping center, it's probably easier to find if you go out the Central exit and look for it on your right. Rooms are large, with the best city views offered by the more expensive twins and doubles. Most singles face another building. Piped into corridors is the sound of twittering birds, which you may like or find annoying. Among the hotel's several food-and-beverage outlets, best are those on the 19th floor with great views; among these, Applause, a classy cocktail lounge with a curved window facade, is a favorite for evening drinks (but note that there's a ¥1,000/\$8.35 music cover charge after 8pm).

1–5 Ekimoto-machi, Okayama 700-8515. ☎ **086/234-7000**. Fax 086/234-7099. front-dp@granvia-oka.co.jp. 328 units. ¥8,500–¥15,000 (\$71–\$125) single; ¥17,000–¥30,000 (\$142–\$250) twin; ¥22,000–¥23,000 (\$183–\$192) double. 15% discount for JR Pass holders. AE, DC, MC, V. Connected to Okayama Station's east side by direct walkway (1 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, French, Chinese, coffee shop); bar; 2 lounges; 20m (66-ft.) indoor pool, sauna, and Jacuzzi (fee: ¥1,600/\$13); concierge; shopping arcade; salon; room service (6:30am–11:30pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Ark Although this hotel with a good location near Okayama Station has a mostly business clientele, its spacious lobby is classier than in most business hotels and the staff is used to foreign guests. Rooms, however, are small, with only a tiny recessed alcove for the closet. The cheapest singles have a semi-double-size bed, while the more expensive ones have a double bed. Ask for a room on a higher floor with its better night view.

2–6–1 Shimoishii, Okayama 700-0907. ☎ **086/233-2200**. Fax 086/225-1663. front@okayama.ark-hotel.co.jp. 183 units. ¥7,000–¥7,500 (\$58–\$63) single; ¥13,000–¥14,000 (\$108–\$117) twin; ¥13,000 (\$108) double. AE, DC, MC, V. A 7-min. walk southeast of Okayama Station (behind Hotel Granvia). Take the central (east) exit and then turn right (south) onto Shiyakusho-suji until you come to a gas station, where you should turn right; the Ark will be on your left. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Continental); bar; lounge; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Mitsui Garden ★ Opened in 2000 near Okayama Station, this smart-looking business hotel distinguishes itself from most in this category with handsome public baths and rooms that are small but with an upbeat color scheme and modern decor. There are mostly singles and a few twins; since most face another building, you might want to request one that doesn't. There's a coin-operated fax and copy machine off the lobby.

1–7 Ekimoto-machi, Okayama 70-0024. ☎ **086/235-1131**. Fax 086/225-8831. 352 units. ¥6,500–¥8,000 (\$54–\$67) single; ¥14,500–¥16,000 (\$121–\$133) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. A 2-min. walk southeast of Okayama Station. Take the central (east exit) and turn right; it's behind Hotel Granvia. **Amenities:** Buffet restaurant (Japanese/Western) open only for breakfast; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Okayama International Hotel ★★ *Value* This Western-style hotel (called the “Kokusai Hotel” in Japanese) is located on a hill above the city and has a resortlike holiday atmosphere. It's surrounded by greenery, and the lobby has a restful view of wooded hills and a waterfall. The lobby also boasts an impressive two-story wall made of Bizen-yaki ceramic tiles, for which Okayama Prefecture is

famous. Comfortable, larger-than-average rooms face either the city or woods. City views are more dramatic; these rooms come with a map to help you pick out the speck of the castle, which you can just barely see if you squint. No matter—the night views are even better. Oddly enough, the most expensive twins face the woods; they're not worth the extra price, as the standard rooms are perfectly adequate. Restaurants also take advantage of the hotel's location with views of either greenery or city panoramas; best is the French L'Arc en Ciel (see "Where to Dine," below). The main drawback to staying here is one of access—the no. 12 bus leaving from Okayama Station's no. 3 platform stops in front of the hotel, but it runs only nine times a day. Ask the tourist office for a schedule.

4-1-16 Kadota Honmachi, Okayama 703-8274. ☎ 086/273-7311. Fax 086/271-0292. www.royalparkhotels.co.jp/okayama. 177 units. ¥6,000–¥10,000 (\$50–\$117) single; ¥12,000–¥18,000 (\$100–\$150) twin; ¥12,000–¥15,000 (\$100–\$125) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 15 min. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (French, Japanese, Chinese, coffee shop); bar; salon; room service (6:30pm–9pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

156 Matsunoki ★★ *Finds* This family-owned enterprise welcomes foreigners and gives them (to my mind) special treatment. Although it offers rooms with and without bathrooms in a cluster of three buildings, foreigners are automatically given rooms in the newer, main building, all with bathrooms at a price normally given to bathroomless units (only if accommodations in the main building are full, which rarely happens, are foreigners shunted to the older buildings). Spotless rooms are mostly Japanese style, though three Western-style rooms are available, with glazed windows that open. The owners are earnestly learning English and offer a small gift to those who make reservations through Matsunoki's Web home page. Meals are served in a cheerful communal dining hall (Western breakfasts are available), but even better is the ryokan's nearby Matsunoki-Tei (see "Where to Dine," below). You'll like this place. All Cinderella wannabes take note: There's a midnight curfew.

19-1 Ekimoto-machi, Okayama 700-0024. ☎ 086/253-4111. Fax 086/253-4110. www3.tiki.ne.jp/~matunoki. 58 units (24 with bathroom). ¥5,000 (\$42) single with bathroom; ¥8,000 (\$67) twin with bathroom (foreigners are only put in rooms with bathrooms). Rates include tax. Breakfast ¥500 (\$4.15) extra; dinner ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra. No credit cards. Station: Okayama (west exit, 2 min.). Walk west on the street to the north of Tokyu Daiichi Hotel; it's just past the New Station Hotel, on the right across from Forum City. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); room service (11am–10:50pm); coin-op washer and dryer; free same-day laundry service for clothes that do not need ironing. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free videos, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Okayama International Center These bright, spotless rooms on the sixth floor of the International Center have everything: proximity to Okayama Station, an English-speaking staff, use of a fully equipped kitchen, free laundry facilities, and an international phone in the lobby with Internet capabilities in case you've brought your own computer (if you haven't, the center has a computer you can use; see "Essentials," earlier in this chapter). The catch? There are only two single rooms, four twins, and one triple (all are nonsmoking), so occasionally no room is available. Your best bet is to call or reserve by fax several months in advance.

Note: There's an 11pm curfew.

2-2-1 Hokancho, Okayama 700-0026. ☎ 086/256-2000. Fax 086/256-2226. 7 units (all with bathroom). ¥5,600 (\$47) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) twin; ¥10,500 (\$88) triple. No credit cards. A 2-min. walk northwest of Okayama Station's west exit. Turn right (north) onto the main street running in front of the station until you reach a 7-Eleven; turn left, and the center is the big building on your right. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; kitchen; free use of washer and dryer; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, no phone.

Value **Countryside Delights: Okayama Prefecture's International Villas**

If you're not on a tight schedule and you don't mind roughing it a bit, you might consider treating yourself to a few days in the countryside around Okayama at one of the prefecture's **International Villas**. Financed and maintained by the Okayama Prefectural Government, these small country inns are the brainchild of a former Okayama governor, who wished to repay the kindness he received from foreigners during his trips abroad as a youth. Thus, these villas are open only to foreigners, though accompanying Japanese guests are welcome.

Altogether, there are six International Villas, most in small villages or in rural settings 1 to 2 hours by train or bus from Okayama city. One, modeled after a traditional soy-sauce warehouse, is located in a mountain village named **Fukiya**, an old copper-mining town that has changed little since the mid-19th century. In **Koshihata** and **Hattoji**, accommodations are in 19th-century renovated thatched farmhouses. In **Ushimado**, you'll stay in a modern exposed-beam villa with sweeping views of the Seto Inland Sea—this one's probably the most popular among young backpackers craving isolation (though beware; it's a long, steep hike from the bus stop). Also offering great views is the villa on **Shiraishi Island** in the Seto Inland Sea, which features beaches, shrines, hiking trails, and accommodations in an airy glass-and-wooden building. In **Takebe**, known for its adjoining hot-springs bathhouse, you'll stay in an innovative wooden building designed to resemble a traditional wooden barge. All of these villas are remarkable; how wonderful it would be if other prefectures took a cue from Okayama and started building similar affordable lodgings!

Each villa is small, with only a half dozen or so simply furnished guest rooms (only those in Ushimado and Takebe have private bathrooms), and is outfitted with kitchen facilities so you can cook your own meals if you'd like a break from eating out (no meals are served), though you should do your grocery shopping before arriving at the villa, since stores may not be close at hand.

If these villas were privately owned, you'd easily pay more than twice what you'll be charged. The cost of staying at an International Villa is only ¥3,000 (\$27) per person for nonmembers, ¥2,500 (\$23) for members (add ¥500/\$4.15 for single occupancy). Membership cards are easily available for ¥500 (\$4.50) upon check-in at any villa—certainly worth it if you're staying more than 1 night. Reservations can be made up to 3 months in advance by contacting the **Okayama International Center**, 2-2-1 Hokancho, Okayama 700-0026; or by calling ☎ **086/256-2535** from 9am to noon and 1 to 5pm (Japan time) Tuesday through Sunday (if Mon is a public holiday, it remains open but closes Tues instead); you can also fax the center at 086/256-2576. More information is available via the Internet at www.harenet.ne.jp/villa.

WHERE TO DINE

Okayama's most famous dish is Okayama *barazushi*, which features Seto Inland Sea delicacies and fresh mountain vegetables. Traditionally served during festive occasions, it consists of a rice casserole laced with shredded ginger and cooked egg yolk and is topped with a variety of goodies, including conger eel, shrimp, fish, lotus root, and bamboo.

EXPENSIVE

L'Arc en Ciel ★★ FRENCH For a memorable meal in a romantic, intimate setting, head for L'Arc en Ciel, which sits atop a hill in the Okayama International Hotel (see "Where to Stay," above) with sweeping views of the city—beautiful at sunset. Chef Yuasa Shigeo, who learned his craft in France, changes the imaginative menu every 2 months. Dishes are works of art, creative and fun; I was surprised to see the filet of sole in white-cream sauce arrive with a small squid and a shrimp and topped with shredded crab and carrots. Another time, I opted for steak in a red-wine sauce, cooked to perfection and served with tomato stuffed with ratatouille—with a clean, hollow beef bone serving as a cup for chives and other condiments. If you can't decide, the Chef's Menu for ¥4,000 (\$33) offers very good value. This restaurant is a bit out of the way, but it's worth it.

Okayama International (Kokusai) Hotel, 13th floor, 4-1-16 Kadota Honmachi. ☎ 086/273-7311. Reservations recommended. Main dishes ¥2,200–¥8,000 (\$18–\$67); set dinner ¥4,000–¥15,000 (\$33–\$125). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–9:30pm. Taxi: 15 min. from Okayama Station.

MODERATE

157 Matsunoki-Tei ★★ (Value) KAISEKI/SHABU-SHABU The family who has long run the inexpensive Matsunoki ryokan (see "Where to Stay," above) also owns this very refined Japanese restaurant, located in an older house in a beautiful traditional setting. Dining here is a luxurious experience, as you sit in a private tatami room (some with leg wells under the table) and enjoy well-prepared dishes brought by an efficient and courteous staff. Although kaiseki is one of the most expensive meals you can have in Japan, it's quite reasonable here, and the all-you-can-eat shabu-shabu has a 2-hour time limit (indicate whether you want kaiseki or shabu-shabu when making your reservation). Even more economical are the obento lunch boxes for ¥1,500 (\$13) and more elaborate mini-kaiseki lunches.

20-1 Ekimotomachi. ☎ 086/253-5410. Reservations required. Kaiseki ¥3,000–¥10,000 (\$25–\$83); all-you-can-eat shabu-shabu ¥2,980 (\$25); set lunch ¥1,500–¥3,500 (\$13–\$29). V. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–10pm. See Matsunoki (under "Where to Stay," above) for directions.

Okayama Plaza WESTERN/JAPANESE For Western fare near the castle and Korakuen, head for the Okayama Plaza Hotel's ninth-floor restaurant, which has the added benefit of castle views. Steak and sole are on the menu, as well as less expensive pasta dishes and sandwiches. Some Japanese set meals are also available, including a tempura set and an obento lunch box (Shokadoh Bento). Or, if it's not crowded, you can come just for a drink: This is a nice place to relax after a day of sightseeing.

Okayama Plaza Hotel, 2-3-12 Hama. ☎ 086/272-1201. Main dishes ¥1,200–¥7,000 (\$10–\$58); set lunch ¥2,000–¥2,500 (\$17–\$21); set dinner ¥4,000–¥6,000 (\$33–\$50). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm. Bus: Okaden bus from gate 5 to Yumeiji-kyodo Bijutsukan-mae (1 min.). Streetcar stop: Shiroshita (15 min.). Just north of Korakuen Park, a short walk across Horai-bashi Bridge.

Petite Mariée ★ FRENCH Brick walls, a beamed ceiling, French music, a large bouquet of flowers, and numerous European knickknacks set the mood at the tiny Petite Mariée, which serves inexpensive yet good French food. The set

meals change monthly, but my ¥800 (\$6.65) set lunch consisted of delicate red-pepper soup, bread, whitefish crowned with fried shrimp, and vegetables. A glass of wine with lunch costs only ¥100 (85¢) extra. Unfortunately, set meals are written in Japanese only, while the a la carte menu, which may include roast lamb or scallops, is in French. Nevertheless, this is a civilized place for a meal.

1-3-8 Yanagimachi. ☎ **086/222-9066**. Main dishes ¥1,700 – ¥4,500 (\$14–\$38); set lunch ¥800 and ¥1,500 (\$6.65 and \$13); set dinner ¥2,900 – ¥8,500 (\$23–\$71). MC, V. Thurs–Tues 11:30am–2pm and 5–8:30pm (last order). Station: Okayama (a 5-min. walk southeast). Take the central (east) exit, turning right (south) onto Shiyakusho-suji; go 1 block past the gas station (it will be on your right) and turn left onto Akura Dori. It's 2 blocks farther on your right.

INEXPENSIVE

In addition to the choices below, there are some inexpensive, rustic snack houses along the moat that separates Okayama Castle and Korakuen Garden, at Tsukimi Bridge, where you can order a drink, noodles, or ice cream and relax with a view of the castle. Most are open daily 8:30am to 5pm (to 4:30pm in winter).

(158) **Okabe**  **Finds** TOFU This informal eatery in the heart of Okayama is a local institution, popular for its specialty, homemade tofu. There's no problem ordering since it serves only one teishoku, which consists of two kinds of tofu along with soup, rice, and pickled vegetables. Seating is along one long counter, behind which an army of women scurry to get out orders. It's simple but atmospheric.

1-10-1 Omotecho. ☎ **086/222-1404**. Teishoku ¥700 (\$5.85). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2pm. Closed national holidays. Streetcar: Shiroshita (2 min.). Walk south through the Omotecho covered shopping arcade to the stoplight and turn right (west); it's on the left, on a corner.

(159) **Shikisai** **VARIED JAPANESE** Located just outside the entrance to Korakuen Garden (its name translates as Four Seasons of Color), this modern restaurant is decorated with Bizen pottery and Japanese ikebana and is a good place to try Okayama specialties, including *barazushi* (¥1,500/\$13) and seasonal dishes like *nabe* (a one-pot stew eaten in winter), *anago* (sea eel), *ayu* (a river fish), and mountain vegetables, as well as soba and udon noodles. Mini-kaiseki are available for lunch. The menu is written only in Japanese, so look at what others are eating. Top it off with Doppo, a locally brewed beer.

1-5 Korakuen-gaien. ☎ **086/273-3221**. Reservations required for dinner. Main courses ¥1,000 – ¥1,900 (\$8.35–\$16); set lunch ¥2,500 (\$21); set dinner ¥3,000 – ¥5,000 (\$25–\$42). No credit cards. Daily 11am–2pm and 6–10pm. Streetcar: Shiroshita (11 min.). Located just north of the 1st entrance gate, next to a souvenir shop.

(160) **Yamadome**  **KUSHIKATSU** This 35-year-old restaurant has a homey Japanese atmosphere, with a local artist's work adorning the walls. It serves fried foods on a stick, from beef to fish to vegetables. The menu is only in Japanese, but the owner speaks English and there's a display case outside. A 10-stick kushikatsu course will set you back ¥1,350 (\$12).

1-22 Tenjincho. ☎ **086/224-6886**. Kushikatsu sticks ¥110 – ¥170 (90¢–\$1.40); set lunch ¥630 – ¥1,270 (\$5.25–\$11); kushikatsu set ¥1,350 – ¥2,290 (\$12–\$19). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11am–2:30pm and 5–9pm. Closed 1 week in mid-Aug. Streetcar: Shiroshita (1 min.). Just north of the streetcar stop, across the small street from the gas station (which you can see from the stop).

9 Kurashiki, Market Town of Many Charms

26km (16 miles) W of Okayama

If I were to select the most picturesque town in Japan, **Kurashiki** would certainly be a top contender. Here, in the heart of the city, clustered around a willow-fringed canal, is a delightful area of old buildings and ryokan perfect for camera buffs.

As an administrative center of the shogunate in the 17th century, Kurashiki blossomed into a prosperous market town where rice, sake, and cotton were collected from the surrounding region and shipped off to Osaka and beyond. Back in those days, wealth was measured in rice; large granaries were built to store the mountains of granules passing through the town, and canals were dug so that barges laden with grain could work their way to ships anchored in the Seto Inland Sea. Kurashiki, in fact, means “Warehouse Village.”

It's these warehouses, still standing, that give Kurashiki its distinctive charm. Kurashiki is also known throughout Japan for its art museums, including the prestigious Ohara Museum of Art with its collection of European and Japanese art. For these reasons, Kurashiki is hardly undiscovered, and Japanese flock here in droves, especially in summer months. Yet despite its overcrowdedness, Kurashiki still rates high on my list of places to see in Japan.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Train If you're arriving in Kurashiki by **Shinkansen** (which takes about 4½ hr. from Tokyo and costs ¥15,850/\$132 for an unreserved seat; it's almost 2 hr. from Kyoto), you'll arrive at **Shin-Kurashiki Station**, about 9.5km (6 miles) west of **Kurashiki Station** and the heart of the city; the **local train** that runs between the two stations departs about every 15 minutes and takes 9 minutes. Note, however, that because Shin-Kurashiki Station is not the town's most convenient station for sightseeing and is not a major stop on the Shinkansen (not all trains stop here), if you're coming from the east it's much easier to disembark from the Shinkansen in Okayama and transfer to a local train for the 12-minute ride directly to Kurashiki Station. Your **JR Rail Pass** is good on all trains.

By Bus The same buses that depart from Tokyo's Shinjuku and Shinagawa stations for Okayama (see “Okayama, Gateway to Shikoku,” on p. 431) continue onward to Kurashiki, arriving in Kurashiki about 40 minutes after their Okayama stop and costing ¥10,400 (\$87).

VISITOR INFORMATION There's a tourist information office on the second floor of **Kurashiki Station** (☎ 086/426-8681) near the ticket wicket, and it has maps in English and a leaflet, “Stroll around Kurashiki.” Another information office, called the **Kurashiki-Kan** (☎ 086/422-0542), is right on the canal in the historic district; ironically the only Western-looking wooden building in the area (built in 1916), it also distributes a map and brochure and has a rest area with tables and vending machines. Both offices are open daily from 9am to 6pm (to 5pm in winter).

ORIENTATION The willow-lined canal, called the **Bikan Historical Area**, is only a 10-minute walk from Kurashiki Station; take the south exit and walk south on Chuo Dori, turning left just before the Kurashiki Kokusai Hotel. In fact, you can walk virtually everywhere of interest in Kurashiki; the Bikan Historical Area is zoned mostly for pedestrians.

EXPLORING THE BIKAN HISTORICAL AREA & ENVIRONS

Kurashiki's **historic old town** is centered on a canal lined with graceful willows and 200-year-old granaries made of black-tile walls topped with white mortar. Many of the granaries have been turned into museums, ryokan, restaurants, and boutiques selling hand-blown glass, Bizen pottery, papier-mâché toys, women's ethnic clothing imported from Bali and India, and mats and handbags made of

igusa (rush grass), a local specialty. Street vendors sell jewelry, their wares laid out beside the canal, and healthy young boys stand ready to give visitors rides in rickshaws.

A resident advised me that, because of the crowds that descend upon Kurashiki during the day (about four million tourists come here a year), I should get up early in the morning before the shops and museums open and explore this tiny area while it's still under the magic spell of the early-morning glow. "Real lovers of Kurashiki come on Monday," he added. "Because that's when most everything is closed, and there are fewer people." I've found that early evening is also a magical time to walk the streets.

Do try to avoid weekends, but no matter when you come, you're likely to fall under the city's spell. One of the most rewarding things to do in Kurashiki is simply explore; even rain only enhances the contrasting black and white of the buildings.

THE MUSEUMS & OTHER SIGHTS

Kurashiki Folkcraft Museum (Kurashiki Mingei-Kan) Under the slogan USABILITY EQUALS BEAUTY, this museum contains folkcrafts not only from Japan but from various other countries as well, giving unique insight into their cultural similarities and differences as reflected in the items they make and use in daily life. Spread through three old rice granaries, displays include baskets made of straw, bamboo, and willow, as well as ceramics, glass, textiles, and woodwork from China, Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, India, Mexico, Sweden, England, Portugal, Spain, Greece, Germany, and Japan. Unfortunately, items are not identified in English, so you'll just have to appreciate their beauty. Plan on spending about 30 minutes here.

1-4-11 Chuo. ☎ 086/422-1637. Admission ¥700 (\$5.85) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) university and high-school students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Tues-Sun 9am-5pm (to 4:15pm Dec-Feb). On the canal, beside the Kurashiki-Kan tourist office.

Japan Rural Toy Museum (Nihon Kyodogangu-Kan) ★★ (Kids) Almost next to the Folkcraft Museum is this museum with its delightful and colorful display of traditional and antique toys, mostly from Japan but from other countries as well (the United States is represented by a cornhusk doll and a Raggedy Ann, among others). Opened in 1967, it has an astounding 12,000 items crammed into six rooms, including kites (200 of them!), miniature floats, antique Japanese dolls, masks, and spinning tops. Incidentally, the huge top in the corner helped the owner of the museum gain entry into the *Guinness World Book of Records*—by spinning 1 hour, 8 minutes, and 57 seconds. You can tour the museum in much less time than that—30 or 40 minutes. A large store at the entrance sells great traditional Japanese toys.

1-4-16 Chuo. ☎ 086/422-8058. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) junior-high and high-school students, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Daily 9am-5pm. On the canal.

Ohara Museum of Art (Ohara Bijutsukan) ★★ ★ This is by far Kurashiki's most impressive museum, a must-see even on a short list of sightseeing. Ohara Magosaburo, who believed that even people in remote Kurashiki should have the opportunity to view great works of art, founded it in 1930 as Japan's first museum of Western art. The main building, a two-story stone structure resembling a Greek temple, is small but manages to contain the works of such greats as Picasso, Matisse, Vlaminck, Chagall, Manet, Monet, Degas, Pissarro, Sisley, Toulouse-Lautrec, Gauguin, Cézanne, El Greco, Renoir, Kandinsky, Klee, Pollack, Jasper

Johns, Oldenburg, Frank Stella, Rothko, De Kooning, and Hundertwasser. The museum has expanded so much since its founding that several annexes have been added over the years. A crafts gallery housed in a renovated granary contains works by some of my favorites, including ceramics by Hamada Shoji, Bernard Leach, and Kawai Kanjiro; and woodblock prints by Munakata Shiko, who lived in Kurashiki 3 years. Another building is devoted to Japanese artists painting in the Western style and to contemporary Japanese artists, which makes for a fascinating comparison. Yet another building displays ancient Chinese art, primarily from prehistoric times to the Tang Dynasty (618–907 A.D.). Allow 1½ hours to see everything, but since your ticket is good all day, you don't have to see it all at once.

1–1–15 Chuo. ☎ 086/422-0005. Admission ¥1,000 (\$8.35) adults, ¥600 (\$5) university and senior-high students, and ¥500 (\$4.15) children. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm. On the canal.

①61 **Ohashi House (Ohashi-tei)** Built in 1796 by a wealthy rice merchant, this traditional mansion is typical of the era, with front rooms used for business and the entertaining of guests, and the rear used as family living quarters. On display are Ohashi family heirlooms, but otherwise the rooms are fairly empty. It's the only merchant's house open to the public, but come for a 15-minute spin through if you've never seen the inside of a traditional Japanese home.

3–21–31 Achi. ☎ 086/422-0007. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) seniors and children. Tues–Sun 9am–5pm. Across Chuo Dori from the Bikan Historical Area, behind the Heisa Hotel.

IVY SQUARE

A few minutes' walk from the canal and museums is a complex called **Kurashiki Ivy Square**, 7–1 Honmachi. Built as a cotton mill by a local spinning company in 1888, this handsome redbrick complex shrouded in ivy has been renovated into a hotel, restaurants, museums, and a few boutiques and galleries selling crafts. It's especially romantic in the evening when, from mid-June to the end of August, there's a beer garden in the inner courtyard (open daily 6–9:30pm) and classical music wafts from loudspeakers built into the courtyard's brick floors.

Museums at Ivy Square include **Kurabo Memorial Hall** (☎ 086/422-0010), which depicts the history of the old spinning company, Kurashiki's biggest employer for decades and providing jobs for many young women in the area; and **Torajiro Kojima Memorial Hall** (☎ 086/422-0011), with paintings by local artist Torajiro Kojima, who went to Europe to purchase most of the pieces in the Ohara museum. Most unique, however, in my opinion, is the ①62 **Orgel Musée** (☎ 086/427-3904), where 30-minute concerts on 30 antique organs, player pianos, and music boxes from Europe, the United States, and Japan are presented every hour on the hour from 10am to 5pm. Admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults and ¥300 (\$2.50) for children.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

Tivoli Park *Kids* This branch of Copenhagen's Tivoli Park imitates the real thing with reproduction 19th-century buildings, flower beds, shows, and rides, including a Ferris wheel, carousel, roller coaster, kiddie rides, 3-D motion theater, and water slide. Even a copy of the Little Mermaid herself is here. What makes it particularly attractive is that it's only a minute's walk from Kurashiki Station and, except during Golden Week and mid-August, is hardly ever crowded. Young Japanese come here on dates, when it's all lit up at night.

12–1 Kotobuki Cho. ☎ 086/434-1111. Admission for everything ¥4,400 (\$37) adults, ¥3,000 (\$25) seniors, ¥4,100 (\$34) junior-high and high-school students, ¥3,100 (\$26) elementary students, ¥1,050 (\$8.75) children. Generally daily 10am–8pm, but varies with the season. Closed end of Jan/beginning of Feb. Station: Kurashiki (north exit, 1 min.).

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE

163 Ryokan Kurashiki ★★ ★ *Finds* The best place to stay to get a feeling for old Kurashiki is right in the heart of it—in one of the old warehouses on Kurashiki's picturesque willow-lined canal. This venerable ryokan consists of an old mansion and three converted rice-and-sugar warehouses more than 250 years old. Filled with antiques and curios, it has long, narrow corridors, nooks and crannies, and the peaceful sanctuary of an inner garden. There's no other ryokan in Japan quite like this one—it's fun simply walking through the corridors and looking at all the antiques, including camera and clock collections. No two rooms are alike; some have views of the canal, while others look out over rooftops or the hotel garden. Western-style breakfasts are available, and at the adjoining Terrace de Ryokan Kurashiki, you can sip ceremonial green tea served by gracious, kimono-clad hostesses while looking out over a small garden. Even if you don't stay at this ryokan, you may wish to stop by for tea or coffee (look for the sign that reads ALBERGO DEL GIGLIO D'ORO around the corner from the main entrance).

4–1 Honmachi, Kurashiki 710-0054. ☎ **086/422-0730**. Fax 086/422-0990. 16 units (10 with bathroom). ¥19,000–¥35,000 (\$158–\$292) per person without bathroom, ¥20,000–¥50,000 (\$167–\$417) per person with bathroom. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. In the Bikan Historical Area, on the canal. **Amenities:** Tea lounge; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

164 Tsurugata ★★ ★ Rustic furniture, gleaming wood, and high ceilings are trademarks of this ryokan, housed in a 250-year-old building on the canal that was once a merchant's house and shop selling rice, cotton, seafood, and cooking oil. The most expensive rooms have a view of the garden with its 400-year-old pine trees and stone lanterns, while the least expensive rooms are on the second floor without a view. All rooms, however, have private toilets, and there are public baths with instructions in English on how to use them, indicating that they're accustomed to foreign guests here. In fact, it's owned by the Kurashiki Kokusai Hotel, which has long been the most popular hotel for foreign visitors (see below).

1–3–15 Chuo, Kurashiki 710-0046. ☎ **086/424-1635**. Fax 086/424-1650. 13 units (10 with toilet only, 3 with bathroom). ¥13,000–¥33,000 (\$108–\$275) per person. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. In the Bikan Historical Area, on the canal. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); in-room massage; next-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Hotel Kurashiki If you prefer a place near Kurashiki Station, you can't get any closer than this Japan Railways Group combination business-tourist hotel above the station. It also offers the advantage of discounts for Japan Rail Pass holders. The rooms in this modern, spotless hotel are pleasantly decorated and have double-paned windows to shut out noise and nicely tiled bathrooms instead of the usual one-unit cubbyholes of most business hotels. The most expensive singles have double-size beds and sofas, making them quite roomy for Japan, though the cheapest rooms in all categories are quite small. Personally, I think it's a shame to come all this way and miss out staying in the Bikan Historical Area, but if it's convenience you want, this is your best bet.

1–1–1 Achi, Kurashiki 710-0055. ☎ **086/426-6111**. Fax 086/426-6163. 133 units. ¥8,500–¥13,000 (\$71–\$108) single; ¥16,000–¥20,000 (\$133–\$167) twin; ¥12,000–¥18,000 (\$100–\$150) double. Up to 20% discount for holders of Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. Above Kurashiki Station's south exit. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Western); shopping arcade; salon; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Kurashiki Ivy Square Hotel ★ An interesting place to stay and a good choice in this price category, this hotel is located in a brick converted cotton mill on Ivy Square. Much of the architectural style of the old mill has been left intact, and rooms have a rural, country atmosphere. Some rooms face a tiny expanse of green grass and an ivy-covered wall or a canal with koi fish. The Bikan Historical Area is just a few minutes' walk away.

7-2 Honmachi, Kurashiki 710-0054. ☎ 086/422-0011. Fax 086/424-0515. info@ivysquare.co.jp. 161 units (67 with toilet only, 94 with bathroom). ¥7,500 (\$58) single with toilet, ¥10,000–¥11,000 (\$83–\$92) single with bathroom; ¥12,500 (\$104) twin with toilet, ¥16,000–¥27,000 (\$133–\$225) twin with bathroom; ¥18,000–¥19,000 (\$150–\$158) double with bathroom. ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra per person during peak holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. A few minutes' walk south of the Bikan Historical Area. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western); summer beer garden; shopping arcade; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Kurashiki Kokusai Hotel ★★ This has long been Kurashiki's most popular Western-style hotel—and it's easy to see why. This delightful hotel, built in 1963, blends into its surroundings with black-tile walls set in white mortar. Its atmosphere is decidedly old-fashioned, which only adds to the charm. Look for the two huge woodblock prints in the lobby, *Barriers of the Universe*, by Japanese artist Munakata Shiko (you can see more of his work at the Ohara Museum). Rooms have nice touches of locally made crafts that lift them out of the ordinary, including woven place mats, Kurashiki glass lampshades, and woodblock prints by a local artist. Female travelers receive a flower in their room. A newer annex offers slightly larger (mostly) twin rooms with larger bathrooms and washlet toilets, but best are the rooms facing the back with a pleasant view of the Ohara Museum, garden greenery, and the black-tile roofs of the old granaries.

1-1-44 Chuo, Kurashiki 710-0046. ☎ 086/422-5141. Fax 086/422-5192. www.kurashiki-kokusai-hotel.co.jp. 106 units. ¥8,000–¥9,000 (\$67–\$75) single; ¥14,000–¥17,000 (\$117–\$142) double; ¥14,000–¥20,000 (\$117–\$167) twin. AE, DC, V. A 10-min. walk south of Kurashiki Station, on Chuo Dori next to the Bikan Historical Area. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); bar; lounge; summer beer garden; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, bilingual cable TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer; washlet toilet (annex only).

INEXPENSIVE

①65 **Kamoi** ★ This minshuku, popular among young people, is located on the edge of the Bikan Historical Area, on a slope leading toward Tsurugatayama Park and Aichi Shrine. There's a small, front-yard garden, and although built only a decade ago, the minshuku follows an architectural style befitting old Kurashiki. A collection of Edo-Period firearms and chests graces the front entrance. Tatami rooms, where you're expected to lay out your own bedding at night, are simple. Fourth-floor rooms have good views of the city and have Western-style communal toilets, but be aware that the hike up the many stairs can be cumbersome with heavy bags. Western-style breakfast is available if ordered the day before, and since the owner is also owner and chef of a restaurant with the same name (see "Where to Dine," below), the food served here is especially good. Not much English is spoken, but they're used to foreign guests. **Note:** There's a 10pm curfew.

1-24 Honmachi, Kurashiki 710-0054. ☎ 086/422-4898. Fax 086/427-7615. 17 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,500 (\$38) per person without meals; ¥6,000 (\$50) per person with breakfast and dinner. No credit cards. A 15-min. walk southeast of Kurashiki Station; walk south on Chuo Dori, turning left just before the Kurashiki Kokusai Hotel and left again when you reach the Ohara Museum; then turn right at Chugoku Bank and look for signs to Aichi Shrine. *In room:* A/C, coin-op TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

Toyoko Inn Kurashikieki Minamiguchi Value Opened in 2000, this inexpensive business hotel has a good location between Kurashiki Station and the

Bikan Historical Area. It also tries harder than most business hotels to draw in customers, offering free Internet access from two computers in the lobby, free Internet access in guest rooms for those traveling with laptops, free movies (but only in Japanese), and free breakfast. Rooms are tiny, with most of the room taken up by double- or queen-size beds, but the price is right. Ask for a room on a top floor for unobstructed city views.

2–10–20 Achi, Kurashiki 710-0055. ☎ **086/430-1045**. Fax 086/430-1046. www.toyoko-inn.co.jp. 154 units. ¥4,800 (\$40) single; ¥7,300 – ¥7,800 (\$61–\$65) double. Rates include tax and continental breakfast. MC, V. A 3-min. walk south of Kurashiki Station, on Chuo Dori on the left side. **Amenities:** Free computer/Internet access in the lobby; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, dataport, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, trouser press.

Young Inn Kurashiki For inexpensive rooms close to the station, you might try this rather different kind of place (at least for Japan). A redbrick building, it has an informal youth-hostel feel and seems more European than Japanese. Painted in bright colors, it looks as though it might have been rather chic at one time but has faded over the years. It caters mainly to young people and has two to three beds per room (all with sink); the beds are arranged on different levels in bunk-bed style. In fact, the three-bed rooms on the fifth floor have to be seen to be believed—the third bed (which is actually a semi-double, so four can stay here) is about 3m (10 ft.) off the floor, and you have to climb a ladder to reach it. Definitely for the nimble who are unafraid of heights. The English-speaking owner also dabbles on the Internet; ask to check your e-mail on the computer in the coffee shop. There's a midnight curfew.

1–14–8 Achi, Kurashiki 710-0055. ☎ **086/425-3411**. Fax 086/427-8388. younginn@kurashiki.jp. 37 units (4 with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) single without bathroom, ¥6,000 (\$50) single with bathroom; ¥7,000 (\$58) twin without bathroom, ¥11,000 (\$92) twin with bathroom; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple without bathroom; ¥14,000 (\$117) quad without bathroom. No credit cards. Station: Kurashi (a 2-min. walk to the right [west] behind the Terminal Hotel). **Amenities:** Coffee shop. *In room:* A/C, coin-op TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone in rooms without bathroom.

WHERE TO DINE

MODERATE

Kiyutei STEAKS Enter through the front gate just off the canal, pass through the small courtyard, and go into a small room dominated by a counter with cooks grilling steaks, the specialty of the house. There's an English-language menu; you're probably best off ordering one of the set meals.

1–2–20 Chuo. ☎ **086/422-5140**. Main dishes ¥800 – ¥3,700 (\$6.65–\$31); steak dinners ¥2,500 – ¥5,500 (\$21–\$46); set lunch ¥850 – ¥1,300 (\$7.10–\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–9pm (June and Dec–Feb Tues–Sun 11:30am–8:30pm). On the canal, across from the main entrance of the Ohara Museum of Art.

Tsuta VARIED JAPANESE/WESTERN Tsuta means “ivy” in Japanese, a reference to the fact that this restaurant is in Ivy Square. Set in the converted spinning factory, it has high ceilings and is airy and bright. Half of the restaurant serves local Kurashiki specialties, including special rice dishes, fish, obento, dishes that change with the season and, for dinner, kaiseki and shabu-shabu. The other half of the restaurant, called Ivy, offers sandwiches, spaghetti, and other Western fare.

Ivy Sq., 7–2 Honmachi. ☎ **086/422-0011**. Set lunch ¥1,500 – ¥3,500 (\$11–\$29); set dinner ¥2,500 – ¥5,000 (\$21–\$42). AE, DC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm.

INEXPENSIVE

El Greco Coffeehouse COFFEE SHOP El Greco is Kurashiki's most famous coffee shop, open since 1959 and simply decorated with a wooden floor, wooden

tables and benches, vases of fresh flowers, and El Greco prints. It serves coffee, fruit juice, milkshakes, ice cream, and cake from an English-language menu.

1–11 Chuō. ☎ 086/422-0297. Coffee ¥450 (\$3.75). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Next door to the Ohara Museum in an ivy-covered stone building.

Kamoi ★ SUSHI This sushi restaurant, occupying a 200-year-old rice granary on Kurashiki's willow-fringed canal, is run by the man who has a minshuku of the same name (see above). Its interior, with stark-white walls and dark wooden beams, is decorated with such antiques as cast-iron teapots, old rifles, gourds, and samurai hats. Since the menu is in Japanese, select from the plastic-food display outside the front door. In addition to sushi set meals, other set meals include a tempura teishoku, the Kamoi Teishoku (featuring sashimi and *barazushi*—a rice dish covered with vegetables and seafood and commonly served during festivals), and—my favorite—the Kurashiki Obento with tempura, tofu, vegetables, rice, and soup.

1–3–17 Chuō. ☎ 086/422-0606. Main dishes ¥900–¥1,500 (\$7.50–\$13); set meal ¥1,200–¥2,000 (\$10–\$17). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 10am–6:30pm. Catty-corner across the canal from the Ohara Museum of Art.

①66 **Kanaizumi** UDON Kanaizumi, housed in a warehouse-style building with tall ceilings, is easy to spot—just look for its chef rolling out udon behind a large window open to the street (though he's on duty only from 11am–1pm daily). In addition to the thick, handmade wheat udon noodles, local cuisine is served. All fixed-price meals come with udon. As the menu is only in Japanese, make your selection from the display case.

8–33 Honmachi. ☎ 086/421-7254. Udon ¥500–¥1,550 (\$4.15–\$13); set meals ¥680–¥1,600 (\$5.65–\$13). No credit cards. Tues–Sun 11am–8pm. Behind (east of) Kurashiki Ryōkan.

Ristorante Rentenchi PIZZA/PASTA This simple, tiny restaurant (with an English-language menu), run by a kind husband-and-wife team, is a good choice for inexpensive dining between Kurashiki Station and the Bikan Historical Area. Neapolitan-style, thick-crust pizza from a wood-burning oven is the specialty, most with one topping, though several more can be added upon request.

2–19–18 Achi. ☎ 086/421-7858. Reservations recommended Sat nights. Pizza and pasta ¥800–¥1,500 (\$6.65–\$13); set lunches ¥650–¥1,800 (\$5.40–\$15). AE, MC, V. Wed–Mon 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–10pm. A 7-min. walk south of Kurashiki Station on Chuō Dōri, on the left side (keep your eyes peeled; the sign is small).

10 Off the Beaten Path: Matsue ★

921km (578 miles) W of Tokyo; 186km (116 miles) NW of Okayama; 402km (251 miles) NE of Hakata (Fukuoka)

Capital of Shimane Prefecture and with a population of about 150,000, **Matsue** lies near the northern coast of western Honshu. It's off the beaten track for most foreign tourists, who tend to keep to a southerly route in their travels toward Hiroshima and Kyushu. The Japanese, however, are quite fond of Matsue, and a fair number of them choose to spend their summer vacation in and around this pleasant small town, visiting its castle and other sights, including two outstanding museums—one devoted to Tiffany glass and the other highlighting contemporary Japanese art in a fantastic garden setting. Hugging the shores of Lake Shinji and Nakaumi Lagoon, cut in half by the Ohashi River, and crisscrossed by a network of canals, Matsue is a pretty castle town blessed with Edo-Era architecture, particularly along the castle moat where many samurai settled. All these things conspire to make a trip to Matsue—despite its out-of-the-way location—very worthwhile.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Train** The easiest way to reach Matsue is from Okayama via a 2½-hour **JR limited express train** ride that costs ¥4,850 (\$41) for an unreserved seat. There's also one train a day, the **Isokaze**, that travels from Kokura in eastern Kyushu to Matsue in about 6 hours, costing ¥4,000 (\$33) for an unreserved seat.

By Bus A bus departs from Tokyo's Shibuya Station (in front of Mark City) nightly at 8pm, arriving at Matsue Station at 6:40am and costing ¥11,550 (\$96) one-way. From Hiroshima, 12 buses depart daily, taking 3½ hours and costing ¥3,950 (\$33) one-way.

VISITOR INFORMATION At the Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai Airport Tourist Information Centers, be sure to pick up the leaflet "Matsue and Izumo Taisha Shrine."

Upon arrival at **Matsue Station**, stop off at the **Matsue International Tourist Information Office** (☎ 0852/21-4034; open daily 9am–6pm), located in a contemporary-looking kiosk in front of the station's north exit, where you can pick up English-language brochures on Matsue and Shimane Prefecture and a good map of the city. More information is available online at www.city.matsue.shimane.jp.

INTERNET ACCESS **Idol**, 1–5–5 Nishitsuda (☎ 0852/23-1253; open daily 9am–3am) is a members-only Internet cafe (you can become a member for ¥200/\$1.65) charging ¥490 (\$4.10) for 1 hour. It's a 20-minute walk south of Matsue Station, or take bus no. 9 (ask the tourist office for directions).

MAIL The main post office, where you can obtain cash from an ATM, is a 5-minute walk from the north exit of Matsue Station, on the street that runs in front of the station to your right (east).

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND Matsue's attractions lie to the northwest of the station and across the Ohashi River, and although buses run virtually everywhere, you can easily cover most distances **on foot**. Matsue Castle is about a 30-minute walk from Matsue Station, with most attractions located just north of the castle along a picturesque moat on a street called Shiomi Nawate. To the west of Matsue Station, about a 10-minute walk away, is Lake Shinji, famous for its sunsets.

If you prefer to ride, ¥500 (\$4.15) buys you an all-day pass for the **Lake Line**, which features red, old-fashioned buses running every 24 minutes in a 1-hour loop through the city and stopping at most tourist sights daily between 8:40am and 6:26pm. Single trips cost ¥100 (85¢). Note that only major stops are flashed in Roman letters inside the bus. Another bus, the red-and-green **Tiffany Line**, is useful for visiting the Louis C. Tiffany Garden Museum and costs ¥300 (\$2.50) one-way.

GOODWILL GUIDES Although Matsue's sights are concentrated in one area of town and are easy to find on your own, you may want a "goodwill guide" to show you around, especially if you're going to Izumo Taisha Shrine. Established by the Japan National Tourist Organization, the goodwill guide network is composed of volunteers with foreign-language abilities who act as guides in their city. All you have to do is pay their transportation costs and entrance fees into museums and sights—and it's nice if you buy them lunch, too. If you wish to have a guide, apply at the tourist information office 2 or 3 days in advance (by phone ☎ 0852/21-4034; by fax 0852/27-2598).

SEEING THE SIGHTS

To save money, note that you can buy a combination ticket for Matsue Castle, Hearn Memorial Hall, and Buke Yashiki for ¥920 (\$7.65) for adults and ¥460 (\$3.85) for children.

Matsue Castle ★ First built in 1611 and partly reconstructed in 1642 and again in the 1950s, Matsue Castle is the only castle along this northern stretch of coast built for warfare as opposed to serving merely as a residence. It's also one of Japan's few remaining original castles—that is, it's not a ferroconcrete reconstruction. Rising up from a hill about a mile northwest of Matsue Station with a good view of the city, the five-story donjon (which actually conceals six floors to give its warriors a fighting advantage) houses the usual daimyo and samurai gear, including armor, swords, helmets, and lacquerware that belonged to the Matsudaira clan, who ruled for 10 generations.

Lafcadio Hearn, a European who lived in Matsue in the 1890s, adopted Japanese citizenship, and wrote extensively about Japan and the Japanese, said of Matsue Castle: "Crested at its summit, like a feudal helmet . . . the creation is a veritable architectural dragon, made up of magnificent monstrosities." As you walk through the castle up to the top floor, notice the staircase. Although it looks sturdy, it's light enough to be pulled up to halt enemy intrusions. Concealed holes on the second floor could serve as drop chutes for raining stones down on invaders. The top floor, with windows on all four sides from which the feudal lord could command his army, is the only such watchtower remaining in Japan. And to think the castle almost met its demise during the Meiji Restoration when the ministry of armed forces auctioned it off, hoping to rid the city of its Feudal-Era landmark. Luckily, former vassals of the clan pooled their resources and bought the castle keep. In 1927, the grounds were donated to the city.

Also on castle grounds is the **Matsue Kyodo Kan**, a Western-style, Meiji-Era building built in 1903 to accommodate Emperor Meiji should he ever turn up (he never did). Today it houses the Matsue Historical Museum, with free admission to its changing exhibits. You can tour this and the castle in less than an hour.

1–5 Tonomachi. ☎ 0852/21-4030. Daily 8:30am–5pm (to 6:30pm Apr–Sept). Admission ¥550 (\$4.60) adults, ¥280 (\$2.35) children. Lake Line bus: Stop No. 6, Otemae-Matsuejo (1 min.), or a 30-min. walk northwest of Matsue Station.

ATTRACTIONS NEAR THE CASTLE

Most of these attractions are located on Shiomi Nawate, a small, picturesque street beside the castle's north moat. I've listed them in geographic order, walking from east to west.

①67 **Teahouse Meimei-an** ★ This is one of Japan's most renowned and well-preserved thatch-roofed teahouses, built in 1779 upon orders of a 29-year-old lord of the Matsudaira clan. It's located at the top of a flight of stairs, from which you have a good view of Matsue Castle (read: photo op). Note the waiting room (and its ancient toilet), for guests awaiting a summons to the teahouse. A separate building offers the bitter Japanese green tea and sweets for an additional ¥360 (\$3), which you might find refreshing before you move on to your next destination.

278 Kitahoricho. ☎ 0852/21-9863. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) students, free for children. Daily 9am–5pm. Lake Line bus: Stop no. 8, Shiomi Nawate (4 min.), or a 5-min. walk northeast of Matsue Castle, back from Shiomi Nawate on a small side street and up a flight of stairs to the left.

①68 **Buke Yashiki** ★ This ancient samurai house, facing the castle moat, was built in 1730 and belonged to the Shiomi family, one of the chief retainers of

the Matsudaira feudal clan residing in the castle. High-ranking samurai, the Shiomi family lived pretty much like kings themselves, having separate servants' quarters and even a shed for their palanquin. Compared with samurai residences in wealthier regions of Japan, however, this samurai house is considered rather austere. As you walk around it, peering into rooms with their wooden walls slid open to the outside breeze, you'll see furniture and objects used in daily life by samurai during the Edo Period. Plan on spending 20 minutes here.

305 Kitahoricho. ㊦ 0852/22-2243. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Daily 8:30am–5pm (to 6:30pm Apr–Sept). Lake Line bus: Stop no. 9, Hearn Kinenkan-mae (3 min.). Northeast of Matsue Castle across the moat, on Shiomi Nawate.

Hearn Memorial Hall (Hearn Kinenkan) Here you'll find memorabilia of writer Lafcadio Hearn (1850–1904) including his desk, manuscripts, photographs, and smoking pipes. The Japanese are fascinated with this man who married the daughter of a Matsue high-ranking samurai, became a Japanese citizen, and adopted the name Koizumi Yakumo. He was one of the first writers to give the Japanese the chance to see themselves through the eyes of a foreigner and to describe Japan to the outside world. His books still provide insight into Japanese life at the turn of the 20th century and are available at all bookstores in Japan with an English section.

Since most Japanese will assume it's out of respect for Hearn that you've come to Matsue, you may want to read one of his books before coming here. His volume *Glimpses of Unfamiliar Japan* contains an essay called "In a Japanese Garden," in which he gives his impressions of Matsue, where he lived for 15 months before moving to Kumamoto to teach English.

Next to the memorial is **Lafcadio Hearn's Old Residence** (㊦ 0852/23-0714; open daily 9am–5pm, to 4:40pm Dec–Feb), a Japanese-style house (and former samurai mansion) where Hearn lived in 1891. It has a pleasant, small garden immortalized in Hearn's essay, "In a Japanese Garden." Admission here is ¥250 (\$2.10) for adults, ¥120 (\$1) for children. You can tour both the museum and residence in less than an hour.

322 Okudanicho. ㊦ 0852/21-2147. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Daily 8:30am–5pm (to 6:30pm Apr–Sept). Lake Line bus: Stop no. 9, Hearn Kinenkan-mae (1 min.). On Shiome Nawate north of Matsue Castle.

①69 **Gesshoji Temple** ★ This is the family temple and burial ground of the Matsudaira clan, feudal lords of Matsue and the surrounding region. It was established back in 1664 by Matsudaira Naomasa, whose grandfather was the powerful Tokugawa Ieyasu. Nine generations of the Matsudaira clan are buried here, each in his own small compound spread throughout the solemn grounds (allow 20 min. to see all of them). At the grave of the sixth lord is a stone turtle (described by Hearn as "the monster tortoise") famous for midnight strolls that terrorized residents; if you rub its head, you'll have good luck. Stop for ceremonial green tea (¥400/\$3.35) in a room of a modern building facing a great little garden. And in June, temple grounds are famous for stunning hydrangeas—don't miss it.

Sotonakabaracho. ㊦ 0852/21-6056. Admission ¥400 (\$3.35) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) university and high-school students, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Daily 8:30am–5:30pm (to 5pm Nov–Mar). Lake Line bus: Stop no. 14, Gesshoji-mae (4 min.). A 15-min. walk west of Matsue Castle.

MUSEUMS ON THE SHORES OF LAKE SHINJI

Louis C. Tiffany Garden Museum ★★ ★ Quite simply, this museum ranks among the finest collections of Tiffany in the world, in a gorgeous setting that

does justice to the works it contains. Opened in 2001 in a building constructed expressly for the collection, the museum chronicles the rich and varied history of Tiffany's nearly 60 years of work in fine and decorative arts from the 1870s to the 1930s. Included are paintings, furniture, mosaics, ceramics, and the largest Tiffany jewelry collection in the world. The stained-glass works are in darkened rooms with natural lighting. Look for the museum's most valuable work, **Deer Window** ★★, made in 1910 of 4,000 pieces of glass brilliantly depicting a deer drinking from a stream on an autumn day in late afternoon. You can easily spend 1½ spellbound hours here.

369 Nishihamasada-cho. ☎ 0852/36-3000. Admission ¥2,000 (\$17) adults, ¥1,800 (\$15) university and high-school students, ¥1,600 (\$13) children, free for children under 7. Daily 9am–5:30pm (to 4:30pm Oct–Mar). Bus: Tiffany-Bijitsukan-mae (1 min.).

Shimane Art Museum (Kenritsu Bijitsukan) This modern museum with huge glass windows overlooking Lake Shinji showcases works by artists of Shimane Prefecture, as well as art that employs water as a theme. Most of the permanent collection consists of works by Japanese artists, though there are also a few pieces by Monet, Courbet, and Rodin. In addition to its many paintings, woodblock prints, photography, and ceramics, there's a rooftop terrace and an outdoor sculpture garden (free of charge) along Lake Shinji, perfect for a sunset stroll. In fact, the museum is so attuned to sunsets that in summer it remains open 30 minutes past sunset. You can see everything here in less than an hour.

1–5 Sodeshi-cho. ☎ 0852/55-4700. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) university and high-school students, free for children. Special exhibitions cost extra. Tues–Sun 10am–6:30pm (Mar–Sept closes 30 min. after sunset). Lake Line bus: Stop no. 22, Kenritsu Bijitsukan-mae (in front of the museum). Or a 15-min. walk west of Matsue Station.

BOAT TRIPS

The **Horikawa Moat Tour (Horikawa Meguri; ☎ 0852/27-0417)** is a tour of the castle moat aboard flat-bottom boats (take off your shoes and sit on tatami) with a rooftop canopy that lowers for tight squeezes under bridges. It's a picturesque, relaxing way to see the city, and the ticket price of ¥1,200 (\$10) for adults and half price for children is a day pass allowing you to reboard as often as you wish. If you stay on board, it takes about an hour to circle the castle. Boarding spots are at Fureai Hiroba near the Hearn Memorial Hall, Kyomise Karakoro Hiroba Square near the Kyobashi Bridge, and Otemae-Matsuejo near Matsue Castle. Boats run every 15 minutes daily from 9am to 5pm (to 6pm in summer) March through October and in November from 9am to 4pm; every 20 minutes daily from 10am to 3pm December through February. Note, however, that commentary is only in Japanese.

From March through November, you can also take a boat over Lake Shinji, which is famous for its sunsets. **Hakucho Kanko (☎ 0852/24-3218)** operates 1-hour boat tours of Lake Shinji six times a day, beginning at 11am and ending with the sunset cruise. Check with the tourist office for a monthly schedule. Trips cost ¥1,200 (\$10) for adults and are half price for children. Boats depart from Daiichi Josenjo or Daini Josenjo (the latter is a stop on the Lake Line but is also just a 5-min. walk from Matsue JR Station).

SHOPPING

For one-stop shopping for locally crafted goods, visit the **Shimane Prefectural Products and Tourist Center (Shimane-ken Bussankanko-kan)**, 191 Tonomachi (☎ 0852/22-5758; open daily 9:30am–6pm), just southeast of Matsue

Castle near the Ichibata department store (Lake Line bus to stop no. 6, Otemae-Matsuejo, then a 1-min. walk). In a modern building that resembles the black-and-white structures typical of the region, the center sells everything from ceramics and abacuses (one of the few prefectures in Japan that still produces them) to toys, jewelry, and foodstuffs, all products of Shimane Prefecture. On the second floor are displays showing how various local products are produced, as well as an English-language video about the prefecture (instructions for how to work the VCR, however, are in Japanese only, so ask someone to help you, since all the buttons are also only in Japanese).

Another interesting place to shop is the **Karakoro Art Studio**, Kyomise Karakoro Hiroba Square (☎ **0852/20-7000**; open Wed–Mon 9:30am–6:30pm), a handsome, century-old former bank renovated into studios and shops selling locally made sweets, tea, jewelry, glassware, woodworking, and other crafts. Changing exhibitions are held in the basement vaults. It's located south of the castle on the moat; both the Lake Line bus and Horikawa Moat Tour boat stop here.

EASY SIDE TRIPS

IZUMO GRAND SHRINE (IZUMO TAISHA)  *Overrated* The most important religious structure in the vicinity of Matsue is easy to see on a half-day side trip, but come only if you have extra time. **Izumo Taisha**, 195 Kizuki Higashi, Taisha-cho (☎ **0853/53-3100**; open daily sunrise to sunset), is considered one of Japan's holiest shrines because, according to popular lore, all the gods in the Shinto pantheon gather here for 1 month every autumn to determine the world's fate for the upcoming year. In Izumo this month is called the “Month of Gods.” Everywhere else in Japan it's referred to as the “Month without Gods,” since they're all away performing their duty, housed in those long buildings flanking both sides of the main shrine. Otherwise, like the Ise Grand Shrines, the main shrine here, reconstructed in 1744, is considered too sacred for mere mortals and is hidden away from close inspection. You'll have to content yourself with a picture showing how it looked 1,000 years ago, when it was reputedly 23m (78 ft.) higher to heaven on top of huge pilings. This makes it the oldest site of a Shinto Grand Shrine displaying the Taisha style of architecture. It's dedicated to Okuninushi-no-kami, the Shinto deity responsible for medicine, farming, and happiness. To the left of the main shrine is the marriage shrine, where you'll see people throwing coins up into the bristled ends of thick, twisted rice ropes adorning the entrance—legend has it that if a coin gets stuck in the bushy end, the thrower will have good luck in marriage.

It's a 30- to 40-minute JR train ride from Matsue Station to Izumoshi Station (¥570/\$4.75), followed by a 30-minute bus ride (¥460/\$3.85) bound for Izumo Taisha (“Taisha-yuki”; get off at the last stop). Or, for a more atmospheric journey, you can also reach Izumo Taisha Shrine by taking the private Ichibata train from Matsue Shinjiko Onsen Station (departures are once or twice an hour) 55 minutes to Izumo Taisha-mae Station (only a couple of trains a day travel directly; otherwise you'll have to change trains in Kawato). The train stops at stations no larger than American closets and costs ¥790 (\$6.60). From Izumo Taisha-mae Station it's a 15-minute walk to the shrine.

ADACHI MUSEUM  *Finds* I was blown away the first time I laid eyes on the Adachi Museum, 320 Furukawa-cho, Yasugi (☎ **0854/28-7111**; www.adachi-museum.or.jp; open daily 9am–5:30pm, to 5pm Oct–Mar), which houses one of Japan's premier collections of Japanese modern art (from the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa periods) amidst a meticulously sculpted garden. Exhibitions, which

are changed four times a year to reflect the seasons, are comprised of 200 works and include the largest collection of distinguished painter Yokoyama Taikan, with at least 20 of his works always on display. A Ceramics Hall displays works by Kawai Kanjiro and Kitaoji Rasanjin. But what makes this museum truly unique is its perfectly landscaped garden, crafted to complement Taikan's masterpieces and continually visible through cleverly crafted windows to incorporate it into the museum's artwork. The effect is surreal, as though the garden is a still picture, a scroll, a Taikan painting. There are several outdoor viewing spots, as well as a coffee shop overlooking a koi pond and two teahouses serving traditional cakes and powdered green tea. You'll want to spend at least 2 hours here.

Admission to the museum is ¥1,100 (\$9.15) for adults, ¥850 (\$7.10) for university students, ¥450 (\$3.75) for high-school students, and ¥200 (\$1.65) for children. **Note:** This is a special rate available only to foreigners, so be sure to bring your passport. To get there, take the JR train from Matsue Station 20 minutes to Yasugi, and then board one of the free shuttle buses that departs seven times a day for the 20-minute ride to the museum (at last check, buses departed at 10:05 and 11am and at 12:05, 1:05, 1:55, 3:05, and 3:55pm, but you'd be wise to check this). There are also city buses, but they're infrequent. In any case, since there are very few buses, it's best to work out a schedule with the Matsue tourist office. A certain travel writer got stranded out here and had to hitchhike.

WHERE TO STAY

Directions are from Matsue Station.

EXPENSIVE

(170) Horaiso ★★ Tucked away on a side street not far from Matsue Castle, this 50-year-old, family-run ryokan is guarded by a wall, an imposing wooden gateway, and an ancient pine tree. Each Japanese-style room is different, some with nice views of an inner courtyard garden. Although the ryokan is a bit worn, it has a certain charm missing in generic establishments. Don't be put off if an old man in the courtyard tries to shoo you away; just find one of the women running it, all of whom are very kind.

101 Tonomachi, Matsue 690-0877. ☎ 0852/21-4337. Fax 0852/21-4338. 10 units (3 with bathroom). ¥15,000–¥20,000 (\$125–\$167) per person. Rates include 2 meals and service. No credit cards. Lake Line bus: Stop No. 6, Otemae-Matsuejo (3 min.). **Amenities:** In-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

(171) Minami-Kan ★★ *Finds* You'll be treated like royalty here at this ryokan, located right beside Lake Shinji. Although parts of the ryokan, including its lobby and rooms with private bathroom, are modern, the original building stems from 1888 and boasts several great tatami rooms with nice wood detailing (these have private toilets but no tubs). Most rooms have views of the lake, but if you really want to feel special, stay in the two-room garden cottage right beside the lake with views of the lake and a garden. Minami-Kan is also renowned for its cuisine.

14 Suetsugu Honmachi, Matsue 690-0843. ☎ 0852/21-5131. Fax 0852/26-0351. 7 units (3 with bathroom, 4 with toilet only); 1 cottage with bathroom. ¥20,000–¥50,000 (\$167–\$417) per person. Cottage from ¥30,000 (\$250) per person. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 8 min. Lake Line bus: Stop no. 5, Kyobashi (2 min.). Off the Kyomise covered shopping arcade in the heart of Matsue. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); hot-spring baths; in-room massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

MODERATE

Hotel Ichibata ★ Matsue's best-known tourist hotel is the Hotel Ichibata in a part of town called Matsue Shinjiko Onsen, a hot-spring spa. Pluses include the

hotel's indoor and outdoor hot-spring public baths with views over Lake Shinji and a nearby jogging path that hugs the shores of the lake. Just behind the hotel is the private Ichibata Line train to Izumo Taisha. None of the singles or doubles has a view of the lake, but the more expensive twins and all the Japanese-style rooms do, including some combination-style rooms with both beds and tatami area.

30 Chidori-cho, Matsue 690-0852. ☎ **0852/22-0188**. Fax 0852/22-0230. hotel@ichibata.co.jp. 142 units. ¥9,000 (\$75) single; ¥14,000 (\$121) double; ¥15,000 – ¥24,000 (\$125–\$200) twin; from ¥19,000 (\$158) Japanese style for 2. Off-season discount available (Dec–Apr). AE, DC, MC, V. Lake Line bus: Stop no. 17, Chidori Minami Koen Park (1 min., in front of the hotel). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Western, coffee shop); bar; lounge; outdoor beer garden (summer only); indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

172 Matsue Urban Hotel Annex (Matsue Urban Hotel Bekkan)

Although it's a business hotel with the usual vending machines in the lobby, this newer annex near Lake Shinji and Matsue Shinjiko Onsen offers large hot-spring baths and rooms with views of the lake. Rooms facing away from the lake are slightly cheaper, though some of these on higher floors do have views of Matsue Castle in the distance. All beds are semi-double in size or larger. By the way, this is the newest of four Urban hotels in Matsue. The original hotel, next door, has a convenience store, and the two you can see from the station's north exit are more worn, with fewer amenities, but they are less expensive.

40-1 Nishi-chamachi, Matsue 690-0845. ☎ **0852/23-0003**. Fax 0852/23-0012. 76 units. ¥6,000 – ¥7,500 (\$50–\$63) single; ¥9,000 (\$75) double; ¥12,000 – ¥13,000 (\$100–\$108) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Lake Line bus: Stop no. 20, Suetsugu Shrine (3 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western/Japanese); noodle counter; rooftop beer garden (summer only); indoor hot-spring baths; in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* A/C, bilingual TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Tokyu Inn Part of a national business hotel chain, the Tokyu Inn is a good choice for travelers who want to spend the night close to Matsue Station. Rooms are small but have everything you need; bathrooms are a bit larger than in most business hotels. Paying slightly higher rates in each category will get you a larger bed in single rooms and a larger room in double and twin rooms.

590 Asahimachi, Matsue 690-0003. ☎ **0852/27-0109**. Fax 0852/25-1327. www.tokyuhotels.co.jp. 181 units. ¥7,500 – ¥8,200 (\$63–\$68) single; ¥12,300 – ¥15,600 (\$103–\$130) double; ¥14,200 – ¥25,800 (\$118–\$215) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Across the street from Matsue Station's north exit. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); lounge; beer garden (summer only); salon; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

INEXPENSIVE

173 Ryokan Terazuya ★★ Value Terazuya offers good value for your money, but it also offers something money can't buy: true hospitality. This Japanese inn has been in business since 1893, owned by the Terazu family that has shown so much kindness to foreigners that many consider their stay here a highlight of their trip. The Terazus treat guests like family, teaching them the tea ceremony in the tearoom, showing them how to make sushi in the communal dining hall, and singing karaoke with them in the tatami-matted party room. The postwar building, while nothing special on the outside, is spotless and colorfully decorated inside. Located across from a small shrine and a Lake Line stop, it's also near the Shimane Art Museum and Lake Shinji, making it convenient for watching those famous sunsets. And although it's only a 7-minute walk from Matsue Station (head west along the north side of the railroad tracks), the Terazus will pick you up if you call ahead. When faxing, please do so during Japanese business hours so as not to wake them.

60–3 Tenjin-machi, Matsue 690-0064. ☎ 0852/21-3480. Fax 0852/21-3422. 9 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) per person without meals; ¥7,000 (\$58) per person with breakfast and dinner. No credit cards. Lake Line bus: Stop no. 28, Shirakata Tenmangu-mae (1 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese). *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

Much of Matsue's regional cuisine comes from Lake Shinji, including sea bass, smelt, carp, freshwater eel, and a small black clam (*shijimi*, popular in soups). *Warigo soba*, which comes with stacked layers of noodles to which you add grated daikon radish, yam, fish flakes, seaweed, and other condiments, is also popular.

MODERATE

Ji Beer Kan GRILLED MEAT In a large, airy setting beside the castle moat west of the Hearn Memorial Hall, this is Matsue's microbrewery/restaurant (every town seems to have one now). You'll find it on the second floor above a souvenir shop; the boat dock for the Horikawa Moat Tour is just outside. Three different kinds of beer are brewed: a pilsner, a fruity pale ale, and an herb-flavored ale; a sampler of all three costs ¥880 (\$7.35). The fare is beef or pork that you cook yourself at your table, with set meals including all the rice and salad you can eat. There are also a few à la carte dishes from a Japanese menu, including noodles, freshwater eel, and soup with *shijimi* clams.

509-1 Kurodacho. ☎ 0852/55-8877. Main dishes ¥680–¥1,200 (\$5.65–\$10); set meal ¥2,000–¥7,000 (\$17–\$58); set lunch ¥680–¥1,200 (\$5.65–\$10). MC, V. Daily 11am–9pm. Lake Line bus: Stop no. 10, Horikawa Fureai (1 min.).

INEXPENSIVE

①74 **Daikichi** ★ *(finds)* YAKITORI Daikichi means "big happiness," and judging from the English-speaking owner's smiling face, that's the order of the day. Customers seem to be content, too, as they crowd into this small counter-seating restaurant. A branch of an Osaka yakitori-ya, Daikichi offers an English-language menu of various yakitori, including chicken, minced chicken meatballs, and chicken with leek or green pepper (three sticks of yakitori come with each order), as well as its own brand of sake and wine; an evening of jovial drinking and eating here will set you back about ¥2,500 (\$21), including a ¥150 (\$1.25) snack charge.

491-1 Asahimachi. ☎ 0852/31-8308. Yakitori ¥80–¥250 (65¢–\$2.10) per stick. No credit cards. Daily 5pm–midnight. Turn left out of Matsue Station; it will be on your right, on the street in front of the station (1 min.).

①75 **Izakaya Ten** VARIED JAPANESE A popular local hangout, this drinking/eating establishment is easy to spot with its high-pointed roof lined with red lanterns and its red neon sign. Inside, more lanterns hang everywhere, and seating is at wooden slab tables or counters. Prices are cheap: Two sticks of yakitori go for ¥240 (\$2). Other items include *sashimi moriawase* (a platter of raw fish), *tonkatsu* (breaded pork cutlet), fried shrimp, and set meals (depicted by photos on the Japanese menu) that include fish, eel, or pork, plus side dishes. Note, however, that there's a ¥300 (\$2.50) *otsumami* (snack) charge, which means they automatically bring an appetizer to your table and charge you for it. To wash it all down, order a draft beer or try a *chuhai* sour—fewer calories than a beer.

113 Kataharacho. ☎ 0852/27-6880. Main dishes ¥380–¥850 (\$3.15–\$7.10); set meals ¥800–¥1,300 (\$6.65–\$11). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–1:30pm and 5pm–midnight. Lake Line bus: Stop no. 5, Kyobashi (1 min.). West of Kyobashi Bridge on the south side of the moat, across from Karakoro Art Studio.

①76 **Kaneyasu** ★ *(value)* FISH/VARIED JAPANESE This modest one-counter place with tatami rooms upstairs has good food and is run by grandmotherly,

bustling women. It has been around for more than 40 years, and most of its customers are local working people, so avoid the noontime rush. It has a great lunch *teishoku*, which includes a piece of *yakizakana* (grilled fish), vegetable, soup, tofu, rice, and tea. In the evening, dishes like grilled fish, yam, bamboo, seasonal dishes, and various vegetables are placed on the counter in lieu of a menu, making ordering easy. It's highly recommended.

Otesemba-cho. ☎ 0852/21-0550. Reservations recommended for dinner. Dinners from ¥3,000 (\$25); lunch *teishoku* ¥650 (\$5.40). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm and 5–9pm; Sat 5–9pm. Closed holidays. 1 block north of Matsue Station's north exit on the street parallel to the one that runs in front, beside a restaurant with a giant crab.

①77 **Yakumoan** ★★ *Finds* SOBA NOODLES A wonderful place to stop off for lunch if you're sightseeing along Shiomisaki north of Matsue Castle, this lovely soba shop with a teahouselike atmosphere is surrounded by a stone wall with a large wooden entryway, a grove of bamboo, bonsai, a Japanese garden, and a pond full of prize carp. Part of the restaurant, a former samurai residence, dates from 200 years ago. Its specialty is noodles, all handmade, including the local specialty Warigo soba and udon. You'll find a plastic-food display case to the left as you step through the entryway. Seating is at either tables or tatami.

308 Kitabori-cho. ☎ 0852/22-2400. Noodles ¥500–¥1,250 (\$4.15–\$10). No credit cards. Daily 9am–4:30pm (last order). Lake Line bus: Stop no. 9, Hearn Kinenkan-mae (1 min.). On Shiomisaki, near the Buke Yashiki samurai house.

11 Hiroshima ★★

894km (554 miles) W of Tokyo; 376km (235 miles) W of Kyoto; 279km (174 miles) E of Hakata/Fukuoka

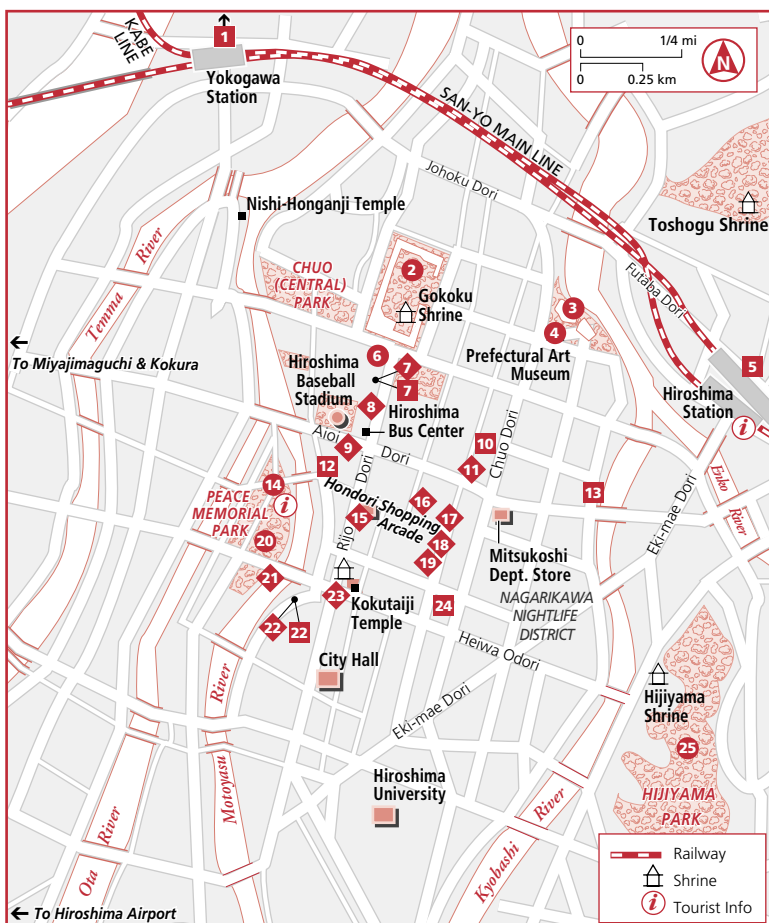
With a population of more than one million, Hiroshima looks just like any other up-and-coming city in Japan. With modern buildings, industry, the manufacture of cars, and ships, it's a city full of vitality and purpose with a steady flow of both Japanese and foreign business executives in and out.

But unlike other cities, Hiroshima's past is clouded: It has the unfortunate distinction of being the first city ever destroyed by an atomic bomb (the 2nd city—and hopefully the last—was Nagasaki, on Kyushu island).

It happened one clear summer morning, August 6, 1945, at 8:15am, when a B-29 approached Hiroshima from the northeast, passed over the central part of the city, dropped the bomb, and then took off at full speed. The bomb exploded 43 seconds later at an altitude of 570m (1,900 ft.) in a huge fireball, followed by a mushroom cloud of smoke that rose 8,910m (29,700 ft.) in the air.

There were approximately 350,000 people living in Hiroshima at the time of the bombing, and almost half of them lost their lives. The heat from the blast was so intense that it seared people's skin, while the pressure caused by the explosion tore clothes off bodies and caused the rupture and explosion of internal organs. Flying glass tore through flesh like bullets, and fires broke out all over the city. But that wasn't the end of it: Victims who survived the blast were subsequently exposed to huge doses of radioactivity. Even people who showed no outward signs of sickness suddenly died, creating panic and helplessness among the survivors. Today, blast survivors still continue to suffer from the effects of the bomb, with a high incidence of cancer, disfigurement, scars, and keloid skin tissue.

Ironically, Hiroshima's tragedy is now the city's largest tourist draw, and visitors from around the world come to see Peace Memorial Park with its haunting museum. But Hiroshima, laced with rivers and wide, tree-lined boulevards, boasts other worthwhile attractions as well, including several excellent museums.



ATTRACTIONS ●

- Hiroshima Castle **2**
- Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art **25**
- Hiroshima Museum of Art **6**
- Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum **4**
- Peace Memorial Museum (Heiwa Kinen Shiryokan) **20**
- Peace Memorial Park **14**
- A-Bomb Dome
- Cenotaph for Korean Victims
- Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims
- Memorial Cenotaph
- Peace Flame
- Peace Memorial Flame
- Statue of the A-Bomb Children
- Shukkei-en Garden **3**

DINING ◆

- Anderson Kitchen **15**
- Atago **23**
- Kanawa **21**
- Kushinobo **17**
- Masui **11**
- Okonomi-Mura **19**
- Sky Buffet Rijo **7**
- Suishin **16**
- Sushi Tei **9, 18**
- Tandoor **8**
- Trattoria Viale **22**

ACCOMMODATIONS ■

- Hotel Granvia
- Hiroshima **5**
- Hotel Silk Plaza **10**
- Hotel Sunroute **22**
- Mitakiso **1**
- Regalo **13**
- Rihga Royal Hiroshima **7**
- Rijyo Kaikan **12**
- Sera Bekkan **24**



Hiroshima is also the most popular gateway for cruises on the Seto Inland Sea and trips to nearby Miyajima, a jewel of an island considered to be one of Japan's most scenic spots, covered later in this chapter.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Hiroshima is almost 5 hours from Tokyo by **Shinkansen** bullet train, 2 hours from Kyoto, and 1 hour and 20 minutes from Hakata Station on Kyushu. The fare from Tokyo is ¥17,540 (\$146) for an unreserved seat.

A **bus** departs from Tokyo Station every night at 8pm and reaches Hiroshima Station at 8am the next morning. The one-way fare is ¥12,060 (\$101).

You can also reach Hiroshima by **boat** from Matsuyama on Shikoku, which takes 1 hour and 10 minutes by high-speed boats costing ¥5,800 (\$48) or 2 hours and 40 minutes by ferries costing ¥2,500 (\$21). From Beppu on Kyushu, the trip costs ¥8,500 (\$71) and takes 3 hours and 20 minutes.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before leaving Tokyo, Kyoto, or the Narita or Kansai airports, pick up a copy of the leaflet "Hiroshima and Miyajima" at the Tourist Information Center.

Upon arrival in Hiroshima, you'll find two local tourist offices at **Hiroshima Station**. The main office (☎ 082/263-6822), on the north side where Shinkansen bullet trains arrive, is open daily from 9am to 12:30pm and 1:30 to 5:30pm. The other tourist office (☎ 082/261-1877), in the underground passage on the station's south side, is open daily from 9 to 11:30am and 12:30 to 5:30pm. A third tourist office is located in the north end of **Peace Memorial Park** in the Rest House (☎ 082/247-6738; open daily 9:30am–6pm Apr–Sept, 8:30am–5pm Oct–Mar). All three facilities have brochures of both Hiroshima and Miyajima with maps in English. Be sure, too, to ask for the **Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card**, available free to visitors; it offers discounts on member hotels, restaurants, some attractions, and more. More information is available at www.hiroshima-navi.or.jp, including dates for the **Yukata Matsuri**, a festival which transforms Hiroshima as everyone strolls the streets in *yukata* (cotton kimono).

INTERNET ACCESS The **International Exchange Lounge**, in the International Conference Center (☎ 082/242-8879) just west of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum (see "Seeing the Sights," below), offers 30 minutes of free Internet connection, though you have to sign up and may have to wait. It also has an international library.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND One legacy of Hiroshima's total destruction was its rebirth into one of Japan's most navigable cities, with wide, open boulevards instead of the usual cramped streets. Hiroshima's main attractions, including Peace Memorial Park, Hiroshima Castle, Shukkei-en Garden, Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum, and Hiroshima Museum of Art, lie to the west and southwest of Hiroshima Station. The most convenient mode of transportation in the city is **streetcar**, which costs only ¥150 (\$1.25) one-way; children pay half fare. If you need to transfer to another line, ask the driver for a transfer card, which you then pass through the card machine upon alighting from the first bus and again when boarding the second bus. When you arrive at your destination, return the card to the bus driver. A 1-day pass costs ¥600 (\$5); note that it does not cover the ferry to Miyajima.

It's probably easiest to make the circuit to Hiroshima's centrally located attractions **on foot**. From Hiroshima Station you can walk to Shukkei-en Garden and the Prefectural Art Museum in about 12 minutes, from where it's another 7-minute walk to Hiroshima Castle. You can walk onward to Peace Memorial

Park in about 15 minutes, passing the Hiroshima Museum of Art and the A-Bomb Dome on the way. Just east of Peace Park is the **Hondori** covered shopping arcade and its neighboring streets, considered the heart of the city with its many department stores, shops, and restaurants.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

As you walk around Hiroshima today, you'll find it hard to imagine that the city was the scene of such widespread horror and destruction almost 60 years ago. On the other hand, Hiroshima doesn't have the old buildings, temples, and historical structures that other cities have, yet it draws a steady flow of travelers who come to see Peace Memorial Park, the city's best-known landmark. Dedicated to peace, the city also seems committed to art—in addition to its fine art museums, you'll find statues, stone lanterns, memorials, and sculptures lining the streets.

Be sure to pick up a **Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card**, available for free at city tourist offices, which gives you a 20% discount on admission to Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Hiroshima Castle, Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art, Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum, and Shukkei-en Garden.

PEACE MEMORIAL PARK & ENVIRONS

Peace Memorial Park (Heiwa Koen) ★★ lies in the center of the city. Signs in English all over the city indicate how to reach it. From Hiroshima Station, take streetcar no. 2 or 6 to the Genbaku-Domu-mae (in front of the Atom Bomb Dome, which is just north of the park) stop. The first structure you'll see as you alight from the streetcar is the **A-Bomb Dome**, the skeletal ruins of the former Industrial Promotion Hall, left as a visual reminder of the death and destruction caused by the atomic bomb. Across the river is the park; it takes about 10 minutes to walk from its northern end to the museum.

Along the way you'll see the park's most touching statue, the **Statue of the A-Bomb Children**, dedicated to the war's most innocent victims, not only those who died instantly in the blast but also those who died afterward from the effects of radiation. The statue is of a girl with outstretched arms, and rising above her is a crane, a symbol of happiness and longevity in Japan. The statue is based on the true story of a young girl who suffered from the effects of radiation after the bombing in Hiroshima. She believed that if she could fold 1,000 paper cranes she would become well again. However, even though she folded 1,300 cranes, she still died of leukemia. Today, all Japanese children are familiar with her story, and around the memorial are streamers of paper cranes donated by schoolchildren from all over Japan. To the west of the statue is the **Atomic Bomb Memorial Mound**, which contains the ashes of 70,000 unidentified victims. On the other side of the statue is the Rest House, where you'll find a branch of the Hiroshima Tourist Office.

Also in Peace Memorial Park is a **Cenotaph for Korean Victims**. It's a little-publicized fact that 20,000 Koreans (10% of those who perished during the war) were killed that fateful summer day, most of them brought to Japan as forced laborers. The monument reads: "The Korean victims were given no funerals or

Impressions

In the dying afternoon, I wander dying round the Park of Peace. It is right, this squat, dead place, with its left-over air of an abandoned International Trade and Tourist Fair.

—James Kirkup, "No More Hiroshimas," *These Horned Islands* (1962)

memorial services and their spirits hovered for years unable to pass on to heaven.” It’s significant to note that, for 29 years, the cenotaph remained outside the park—even today, Koreans and their descendants face discrimination in Japan. In 1999, Hiroshima’s mayor, calling for an end to prejudice against Korean residents in Japan, gave the memorial a new home within Peace Memorial Park.

Between the statue and the museum is the **Memorial Cenotaph**, designed by Japan’s famous architect Kenzo Tange (who also designed the Tokyo Metropolitan Government offices in Shinjuku; see p. 188). Shaped like a figurine clay saddle found in ancient tombs, it shelters a stone chest, which in turn holds the names of all of those killed by the bomb. An epitaph, written in Japanese, carries the hopeful phrase, “Repose ye in Peace, for the error shall not be repeated.” If you stand in front of the cenotaph, you’ll have a view through the hollow arch of the Peace Flame and the A-Bomb Dome. It is said that the **Peace Flame** will continue to burn until all atomic weapons vanish from the face of the earth and nuclear war is no longer a threat to humanity.

Between the Tourist Information Center and the Peace Memorial Museum East Building is the new **Hiroshima National Peace Memorial Hall for the Atomic Bomb Victims** (★) (☎ 082/543-6271), dedicated to the bomb’s victims and their experiences. Its Hall of Remembrance re-creates the bombed city as seen from the hypocenter through a panorama made of 140,000 tiles, the number of people estimated to have died by the end of 1945. The rest of the memorial is a vast, computerized audiovisual library with information on victims and their histories, photos, and belongings. The English leaflet not only provides excellent information but also gives access to the large-screen computers (insert it to activate them). Admission is free and it’s open the same hours as the Peace Memorial Museum.

Just beyond is the main focus of the park, the **Peace Memorial Museum (Heiwa Kinen Shiriyokan)** (★★★, 1–2 Nakajima-cho, Naku-ku (☎ 082/241-4004; www.pcf.city.hiroshima.jp; daily 9am–6pm Apr–July, daily 9am–5pm Dec–Mar, daily 8:30am–7pm Aug 1–15, daily 8:30am–6pm Aug 16–Nov). It comprises two buildings: the East Building, which tells of Hiroshima before the bomb fell and what happened to the city in the following months and years, and the West Building, which concentrates on that fateful August day. Entrance to the museum is in the East Building; admission is ¥50 (40¢). Plan on a minimum of 1 hour to tour both buildings.

The newer East Building addresses Hiroshima’s militaristic past, challenging the city’s former self-characterization as a blameless victim. In great detail, it explains why Hiroshima was selected as the blast site—as Imperial Headquarters, Hiroshima was home to Japan’s military command center as well as a military supply base (Mitsubishi, which produced war ships, was based here). TV screens show actual footage of the bomb being dropped and its aftermath. A 360-degree photograph, taken by U.S. Navy personnel when the Allies arrived, shows Hiroshima’s utter destruction. The museum also documents Hiroshima’s current dedication to the abolition of nuclear weapons; a globe of the world provides a chilling map of nuclear proliferation. On the ground floor is the Video Theatre, where two documentaries in English are shown throughout the day. One focuses on Hiroshima and the results of the bombing, while the second film takes a more scientific look at the atomic bombs in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The West Building concentrates on the suffering caused by the atomic bomb, beginning with panoramas of scorched earth and seared victims and photographs of the atomic bomb that destroyed the city and the intensity of the blast’s

epicenter. It then shows in graphic detail the effects of the blast on bodies, buildings, and materials. Most of the photographs in the exhibit are of burned and seared skin, charred remains of bodies, and people with open wounds. There's a bronze Buddha that was half-melted in the blast and melted glass and ceramics. Some granite steps show a dark shadow that suggests someone had been sitting there at the time of the explosion—the shadow is all that remains. Tattered clothing and other personal effects are accompanied by short biographies of their owners, many of them children and teenagers and many of whom died in the blast.

Needless to say, visiting Peace Memorial Park is a sobering and depressing experience, but it's perhaps a necessary one. Every concerned individual should be informed of the effects of an atomic bomb. We should be aware that what was dropped on Hiroshima is small compared to the bombs of today (in 1961, the Soviet Union tested a hydrogen bomb 3,300 times more powerful than the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima). From the museum, the closest streetcar stop is Fukuro-machi, where you can catch streetcar no. 1 for Hiroshima Station.

MORE SIGHTS & ATTRACTIONS

Hiroshima Castle ★★ Originally built in the 1590s but destroyed in the atomic blast, Hiroshima Castle was reconstructed in 1958. Its five-story wooden donjon is a faithful reproduction of the original, but the main reason to come here is the very good museum housed in the castle's modern interior, which can be toured in about 30 minutes. The museum is devoted to Hiroshima's history as a flourishing castle town, with good presentations in English. It also gives the best description I've seen on castles in Japan, including differences in architecture between those built on hills (for defense) and those built on plains (mainly administrative). Videos describe Hiroshima's founding and the construction of Hiroshima Castle, while displays explain the differences in lifestyle between samurai and townspeople, the hierarchy of the feudal administration system, and other aspects of Edo life. There's also samurai gear, models of old Hiroshima and the castle, and pictures of the past. The top of the donjon provides a panoramic view of the city.

21-1 Moto-machi, Naka-ku. ☎ 082/221-7512. Admission ¥320 (\$2.65) adults, ¥160 (\$1.35) children. Daily 9am-5:30pm (to 4:30pm Oct-Mar). A 15-min. walk north of Peace Memorial Park, or a 20-min. walk west of Hiroshima Station. Streetcar: 1, 2, or 6 to Kamiya-cho (10 min.); since the street car exit is underground, follow the signs to the Kencho-mae exit, continue to Jonan Dori, then take the underpass on the left-hand side of the road. The entrance to the underpass isn't marked in English, but it's the only way to cross the street.

Hiroshima City Museum of Contemporary Art ★★ Set on a hill in Hijiyama Park overlooking Hiroshima, this museum was designed by renowned Japanese architect Kurokawa Kisho in a building reminiscent of Japanese warehouse architecture. It's a great setting for the trend-setting contemporary pieces it displays, with works by established and promising Japanese artists, including Okamoto Taro (famous for his faces), Ikeda Masuo, Aimitsu, Kondo Tatsuo, and pop artist Yokoo Tadanori (the Andy Warhol of Japanese art). It's a good place to explore the postwar Japanese art scene. There's also an outdoor sculpture garden with works by Botero and Moore. Plan on an hour here. Incidentally, for fans of *manga* (comics), the **Hiroshima City Comics Library** (☎ 082/261-0330; Tues-Sun 10am-5pm; no admission charge), with 77,000 comics and related materials, is also in Hijiyama Park.

1-1 Hijiyama Koen, Minami-ku. ☎ 082/264-1121. www.hcmca.cf.hiroshima.jp. Admission ¥320 (\$2.65) adults, ¥240 (\$2) university students, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Tues-Sun 10am-5pm (to 7pm July-Aug). Streetcar: no. 5 to Hijiyama-shita (7 min.).

Hiroshima Museum of Art ★★ This private museum, housed in a modern round building in the heart of the city, has a permanent collection of some 200 paintings, half by French painters from Romanticism to École de Paris and presented in chronological order. Included are works by Delacroix, Courbet, Corot, Manet, Monet, Renoir, Degas, Toulouse-Lautrec, Rousseau, Cezanne, Gauguin, van Gogh, Matisse, Braque, Chagall, and Picasso. Also on display are about 90 works by Japanese artists in the Western style from the Meiji Era to the present, including works by Kuroda Seiki and Kishida Ryusei. You can see it all in less than an hour.

3-2 Motomachi, Naka-ku. ☎ 082/223-2530. www.mighty.co.jp/museum. Admission ¥1,000 (\$8.35) adults, ¥500 (\$4.15) university and high-school students, ¥200 (\$1.65) junior-high and elementary students. Daily 9am–5pm. Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to Kamiya-cho (Kencho-mae exit, 3 min.). In Chuo Park, across from the Rihga Royal Hotel (Hiroshima's tallest building).

Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum The main focus of this museum is art created by artists who have some kind of relationship to Hiroshima Prefecture, including Aimitsu (look for his self-portrait), Minami Kunzo (*Sitting Woman*), and Kobayashi Senkou, as well as works from the 1920s and 1930s by non-Japanese artists who have influenced contemporary art in Japan such as Salvador Dalí, Lyonel Feininger, Picasso, and Thomas Hart Benton. Asian decorative arts, including ceramics and lacquerware, round out the permanent collection. If you

Impressions

We had found the awesome sight of a Hiroshima that was now even bigger than it had been before the bomb, far richer and more prosperous.

—James Cameron, *Point of Departure* (1967)

purchase a combination ticket to Shukkei-en Garden, you can enter the garden directly from the museum.

2-22 Kaminobori-cho, Naka-ku. ☎ 082/221-6246. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults; ¥300 (\$2.50) university students; free to high-school, junior-high, and elementary students. Combination ticket for museum and Shukkei-en Garden ¥600 (\$5) for adults and ¥380 (\$3.15) for students. Tues–Fri and Sun 9am–5pm; Sat 9am–7pm. Streetcar: no. 9 to Shukkeien-mae (1 min.). Adjacent to Shukkei-en Garden. Or a 12-min. walk from Hiroshima Station

Shukkei-en Garden Shukkei-en Garden, which means “landscape garden in miniature,” was first laid out in 1620 by a master of the tea ceremony, with a pond constructed in imitation of famous Lake Xi Hu in Hangzhou, China. Using streams, ponds, islets, and bridges, it was designed to appear much larger than it actually is and it is best viewed on a circular stroll. Like everything else in Hiroshima, it was destroyed in 1945, but amazingly, it looks like it's been here forever. Unfortunately, like most gardens in Japan, tall neighboring buildings detract from the garden's beauty (there ought to be a law), but it's still a pleasant respite from city traffic.

2-11 Kaminobori-cho, Naka-ku. ☎ 082/221-3620. Admission ¥250 (\$2.10) adults, ¥180 (\$1.50) university and high-school students, ¥120 (\$1) children. Combination ticket for Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum and the garden ¥600 (\$5) for adults and ¥380 (\$3.15) for university students. Daily 9am–6pm (to 5pm Oct–Mar). Adjacent to Hiroshima Prefectural Art Museum.

SEEING THE SETO INLAND SEA

BY BOAT Hiroshima serves as a departure point for day cruises on the Seto Inland Sea. Stretching between Honshu and the islands of Shikoku and Kyushu, the Inland Sea is dotted with more than 3,000 pine-covered islands and islets, part of which is protected as Seto-Naikai (Seto Inland Sea) National Park. Two

cruises operate year-round, with departures Wednesday through Sunday at 11:30am (returning at 2pm) and at 6:50pm (returning at 9pm). The cost of the cruise varies according to the meal you select: ¥5,000 (\$42) or ¥7,000 (\$58) for lunch; and ¥7,500 (\$63) or ¥10,000 (\$83) for dinner. Children receive only a ¥500 (\$4.15) discount for all of these. Since cruise times and days can change, especially in winter, contact the Seto-Naikai Kisen steamship company (☎ **082/253-1212**) for the latest information and to make reservations. Cruises depart from Hiroshima Port (streetcar no. 1, 3, or 5 to Ujina).

BY BICYCLE If you'd rather be a participant than an observer, a more active way to see the Seto Inland Sea is to cycle across on the **Shimanami Kaido** (also referred to as the Setouchi Shimanami Seaway), a 70km (43-mile) route between Imabari on Shikoku Island and Onomichi in Hiroshima Prefecture. The route travels over six islands connected by 10 bridges, with numerous temples, sight-seeing spots, restaurants, and inns along the way. Rental bikes are available at **Onomichi Kowan Chushajo**, 9 Higashi Goshochō, Onomichi City (☎ **0848/20-1360**), open daily 9am to 6pm. Bikes cost ¥500 (\$4.15) for a day, while motorized cycles go for ¥800 (\$6.65), plus a deposit of ¥1,000 (\$8.35) and ¥2,000 (\$17) respectively. If you wish to make a one-way trip and leave the cycle in Imabari or at one of the cycle rental stops along the way, you forfeit your deposit. Each of the seven bridges along the route charges a toll, for a total of ¥510 (\$4.25) if you go all the way to Shikoku. To reach Onomichi from Hiroshima, take the JR Sanyo Honsen line 1½ hours to Onomichi Station (fare: ¥1,450/\$12; free for rail pass holders), from where it's a 3-minute walk toward the port where the cycling company is located. For more information about the Shimanami Kaido, see the section on Matsuyama in chapter 9.

WHERE TO STAY

The **Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card**, available free at local tourist offices, provides a 10% discount for several hotels, including the Granvia, Righa Royal, and Sunroute.

EXPENSIVE

178 Mitakiso ★★☆☆ *Finds* This beautiful traditional Japanese inn, part of which is 80 years old, has an idyllic, quiet setting. Its rooms are spread along an exquisite landscaped garden with stunted pines, ponds, tiny maple trees, stone lanterns, and meandering streams. The best rooms are elegant and private with sliding doors that open onto the main garden. (Unfortunately, some views are compromised by a tall apartment building next door.) The absolutely best view is afforded by the Tsubaki room, while the Aiyame boasts a cypress tub. The least expensive rooms, on the second floor, face the front garden and street. The ryokan is well known for its excellent cuisine, served either in your guest room or in a dining hall as per your request. You can even dine here without staying, with set meals starting from ¥10,000 (\$83). Although the ryokan is a bit far

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide by an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in appendix C showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, the **Mitakiso** ryokan (above), refer to no. 178 in appendix C.

from the center of town, you can catch a bus just a 2-minute walk from the ryokan that will deliver you downtown near Hiroshima's attractions. It's a great place for a splurge.

1–7 Mitaki-cho, Nishi-ku, Hiroshima 733-0005. ☎ 082/237-1402. Fax 082/237-1403. 5 units. ¥25,000–¥40,000 (\$208–\$333) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. JR Station: Yokogawa (7 min.). Taxi: 10 min. from Hiroshima Station. Bus: no. 7 or 8 from the Bus Center to Misasasan-chome. The entrance is past a yellow Japanese wall and a massive stone lantern. **Amenities:** In-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Rihga Royal Hiroshima ★★ Opened in 1994, the 33-story Rihga Royal stands out as Hiroshima's tallest hotel and has a convenient location in the heart of the city between Hiroshima Castle and Peace Park. It's connected to a large complex called Motomachi Cred, which includes the Pacela shopping mall and Sogo department store. A sophisticated, European atmosphere makes it a favorite among foreign travelers; even the lobby lounge—with its tall ceiling and circular glass facade—makes for a cheerful meeting place. Large rooms with luxurious furnishings come with plenty of features, including semi-double beds in the singles and twins, and magnifying mirrors and lots of counter space in the bathrooms. Rates are based on floor height, but even some of the cheapest twins have great castle views. Others face the Seto Inland Sea and Peace Park. A nice touch are the pictorial maps in each room describing the view, but the best view of all is afforded from the 33rd floor, where the Sky Buffet Rijo serves an all-you-can-eat buffet lunch and set dinners (see “Where to Dine,” below), and the Rihga Top provides a sophisticated setting for afternoon tea or evening cocktails.

6–78 Motomachi, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0011. ☎ 082/502-1121. Fax 082/228-5415. www.rihga.com. 490 units. ¥12,000–¥14,000 (\$100–\$117) single; ¥18,000–¥24,000 (\$150–\$200) double; ¥19,000–¥28,000 (\$158–\$233) twin; from ¥30,000 (\$250) executive twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: 1, 2, or 6 to Kamiyacho (exit near the Astram Line, 1 min.). **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 2 bars; lounge; atrium-style pool with Jacuzzi and sauna (¥3,000/\$25); health club (¥3,000/\$25); concierge; shopping arcade; health and dental clinic; salon; barber; room service (7am–11:30pm); in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, bathroom scale, washlet toilet, trouser press.

MODERATE

Hotel Granvia Hiroshima ★ Owned by JR West and Hankyu (and offering discounts to holders of the Japan Rail Pass), this hotel is convenient for short stays because it's connected to the Shinkansen (north) side of the station. Inconvenient, however, is that to get to Hiroshima's sights and streetcars, which are on the other side of the station, you have to walk through an underground passage (if you have a rail pass, you can pass through the station, which is much quicker). Rooms are comfortable but are small and have no view. A plus are the hotel's many dining options, including one serving Hiroshima-style *okonomiyaki*.

1–5 Matsubara-cho, Minami-ku, Hiroshima 732-0822. ☎ 082/262-1111. Fax 082/262-4050. www.hgh.co.jp. 410 units. ¥9,300–¥14,500 (\$78–\$121) single; ¥15,500–¥19,000 (\$129–\$158) double; ¥18,500–¥30,000 (\$154–\$250) twin. 10% discount for holders of Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. Attached to Hiroshima Station. **Amenities:** 10 restaurants; 2 bars; 2 lounges; outdoor beer terrace (summer only); access to health club in Hiroshima Station with gym, indoor pool, and sauna (discount ticket at concierge desk ¥2,750/\$23); concierge; tour desk; business center; shopping arcade; salon; room service (7–10am and 7–11pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Hotel Sunroute ★★ Although most hotels in this chain are strictly business hotels, this hotel's excellent location, next to the river and catty-corner from the museum in Peace Memorial Park, makes it a popular choice for tourists as well.

The highest-priced rooms have the additional advantage of views of the park; the cheapest rooms, however, are on low floors and have no views whatsoever.

3–3-1 Ohtemachi, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0051. ☎ 082/249-3600. Fax 082/249-3677. www.sunroute.jp. 284 units. ¥8,500–¥9,500 (\$71–\$79) single; ¥15,000–¥18,000 (\$125–\$133) double; ¥16,000–¥25,000 (\$133–\$208) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1 to Fukuro-machi (3 min.). Walk south (the same direction as your streetcar) on Rijo Dori to Heiwa Odori (there's a small shrine on the corner) and turn right; it's on your left before the river. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Italian); bar; room service (5–8:30pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

(179) Sera Bekkan ★★ This modern ryokan is in the city center just off Namiki Dori. Although the building itself is far from traditional and resembles a hotel with its wide corridors and elevator, the rooms are Japanese style with tatami mats and shoji screens; three have views of a tiny garden. There are large public baths. Dinner is served in your room; Western-style breakfasts are available. Rates vary depending on the meal you order for dinner and the number of people staying in the room.

4–20 Mikawa-cho, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0029. ☎ 082/248-2251. Fax 082/248-2768. 35 units (all with bathroom). ¥10,000–¥20,000 (\$83–\$167) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to Hatchobori stop (4 min.). Walk south on Chuo Dori past Wiz Wonderland and turn right; take the 1st left and then the 1st right. It's on the corner to the left. **Amenities:** Game room; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

Hotel Silk Plaza This locally owned hotel, built in 1975, has a helpful front desk staff. All rooms are very simple and small (few have closets), but cheeriness is imparted by light-colored walls and colorful bedspreads. Though all single rooms have semi-double beds, note that the cheapest singles open toward a wall with windows of other guest rooms just .6km (2 ft.) away. Hallway service corners provide tea and hot water and vending machines; hair dryers are available at the front desk.

14–1 Hatchobori, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0013. ☎ 082/227-8111. Fax 082/227-8110. 218 units. ¥5,700–¥6,500 (\$48–\$54) single; ¥11,000 (\$92) double or twin; ¥15,600 (\$130) triple; ¥20,000 (\$167) quad. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to the Hatchobori stop (2 min.). 2 blocks north on Hakushima Dori (there's a streetcar line here leading north to Shukkei-mae) on the left. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, coffee shop); bar; business corner with free Internet use; 24-hr. convenience store; in-room massage; coin-op washer/dryer; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge.

Regalo ★★ *Finds* Opened in 1998 on one of Hiroshima's many rivers, this small, personable hotel offers great value and is a true find—nicely decorated with an Italian flair and managed by a very friendly staff, some of whom speak English. The cheapest rooms have glazed windows facing the back, while rooms only slightly more expensive have refreshing views of the river. A very atmospheric Italian restaurant also capitalizes on the river view, while the Ohazu cafe is a combination restaurant and convenience store; you may either buy takeout or eat in (open 7am–3am). Copy and fax service are available in the lobby, which also serves as a lounge. This establishment is really a pleasant surprise compared to most inexpensive lodgings.

9–2 Hashimoto-cho, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0015. ☎ 082/224-6300. Fax 082/224-6301. 60 units. ¥6,500–¥7,000 (\$54–\$58) single; ¥9,500–¥10,000 (\$79–\$83) double; ¥9,800–¥10,000 (\$82–\$83) twin. Rates include breakfast, tax, and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to Kanayama-cho (2 min.). Walk back toward the bridge but don't cross it; turn left at the river. Or a 13-min. walk from Hiroshima Station. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Italian, Japanese); tea lounge; convenience store; in-room massage; coin-op washer and dryer; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

180 Rijo Kaikan ★ *Value* Located close to the Hondori covered shopping arcade and Peace Memorial Park, this modern, triangular-shaped building has rooms intended primarily as lodging for government office employees, but anyone can stay here if there's space (try to make reservations 6 months in advance). Rooms are great for the price—bright, white, and cheerful. Note that check-in isn't until 4pm. Rijo, off the lobby, serves inexpensive lunches.

1-5-3 Otemachi, Naka-ku, Hiroshima 730-0051. ☎ **082/245-2322**. Fax 082/245-2315. 50 units. ¥5,300–¥6,000 (\$48–\$54) single; ¥9,800–¥15,000 (\$82–\$129) twin. Breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra; dinner ¥1,800 (\$15) extra. MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1 to Hondori (2 min.). Walk west 1 block through the covered shopping arcade and take the 1st right; it's marked KENMIN BUNKA CENTER OF HIROSHIMA PREFECTURAL CULTURE CENTER on the city maps. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Western, coffee shop); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE EXPENSIVE

In addition to the restaurants listed here, you might want to splurge at the renowned Mitakiso ryokan (see “Where to Stay,” above).

Atago ★★ *TEPPANYAKI* This teppanyaki steak restaurant, on the ground floor of an office building on Heiwa (Peace) Odori just east of Rijo Dori, is good and convenient if you're visiting the Peace Memorial Museum just across the river. It's strikingly modern with its marble tables and geometric lines, and chefs prepare steak and seafood before your eyes. The ¥6,000 (\$50) dinner includes salad, appetizer, beef sirloin or tenderloin, vegetables, soup, rice, and dessert.

7-20 Nakamachi. ☎ **082/241-1111**. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥5,000–¥16,000 (\$42–\$133); set lunch ¥2,500–¥9,000 (\$21–\$75). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9:30pm. Streetcar: no. 1 to Fukuro-machi (2 min.). Next to the ANA Hotel on Peace Blvd.

181 Kanawa ★★ ★ *Finds OYSTERS* There are 10,000 rafts cultivating oysters in Hiroshima Bay, with a yearly output of 30,000 tons of shelled oysters. Needless to say, oysters are a Hiroshima specialty, and this houseboat, moored east of Peace Memorial Park on the Motoyasu River at the Heiwa Odori Bridge, is one of the best places to enjoy them. Although winter is the optimal time for fresh oysters, the owner has his own oyster rafts and freezes his best stock in January so that he's able to serve excellent oysters even in summer. This floating restaurant has been here more than 40 years, and dining is in tatami rooms with views of the river. The English-language menu lists set meals that feature oysters prepared various ways, including in the shell, fried, in soup, and steamed.

On the Motoyasu River, at Heiwa Odori Bridge. ☎ **082/241-7416**. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥7,000–¥15,000 (\$58–\$125); set lunch ¥3,000–¥4,000 (\$25–\$33). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–9pm (last order). Closed irregularly. Streetcar: no. 1 to Fukuro-machi (3 min.). Next to the Sunroute Hotel.

MODERATE

Sky Buffet Rijo ★ *VARIED BUFFET* This pleasant restaurant, serving inexpensive all-you-can-eat buffets, has a drawing-room ambience, but the main reason to dine here is that it's the city's highest restaurant, with a view of Hiroshima Castle. Buffets center on changing monthly themes (perhaps Italian one month, curries the next) but always have Japanese and Western selections as well, plus one of the largest dessert and ice-cream buffets we've ever seen. After your meal, retire to the classy Rihga Top bar with views of the Seto Inland Sea, but note that there's a ¥1,000 (\$8.35) table charge for the live jazz in the evenings.

Rihga Royal Hiroshima, 33rd floor, 6-78 Motomachi. ☎ **082/502-1121**. Lunch buffet ¥2,500 (\$21); dinner buffet ¥3,500 (\$29), with ¥300 (\$2.50) added weekends and holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5:30–10pm. Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to Kamiyacho (1 min.).

Trattoria Viale ★ ITALIAN Convenience to Peace Memorial Park, great 15th-floor views, and good food make this an optimal choice for tourists. Though counter seats have the best views, it's nearly impossible to sit with your legs under the counter, so insist on a table. The antipasto plate is a delicious way to start your meal. The wood-fired pizzas are wafer-thin and flaky, while the pasta may be more al dente than you like. Still, all is forgiven as you dine and take in the view. The dinner dessert table is very tempting.

Hotel Sunroute, 15th floor, 3-3-1 Ohtemachi. ☎ 082/249-3600. Pasta and pizza ¥1,200–¥1,500 (\$10–\$13); main dishes ¥2,300–¥2,500 (\$19–\$21); set dinner ¥3,800 and ¥5,000 (\$32 and \$42); set lunch ¥1,500 and ¥2,000 (\$13 and \$17). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 5–10pm. Streetcar: no. 1 to Fukuro-machi (see directions to hotel, above).

INEXPENSIVE

Anderson Kitchen INTERNATIONAL Occupying an old, renovated bank building in the Hondori covered shopping arcade, this popular place not far from Peace Memorial Park has a gourmet food department on its ground floor offering baked goods, wine, and sandwiches, while the second floor has a cafeteria with various counters specializing in different types of food—salads, sandwiches, pizza, stews, desserts, or drinks: Just pick up a tray and select the items you want. You pay at the end of each counter. Chinese and European restaurants with sit-down service are also on the second floor.

7-1 Hondori. ☎ 082/247-2403. Dishes ¥550–¥1,200 (\$4.60–\$10). AE, DC, V. Daily 11am–9pm. Closed 3rd Wed of every month. Streetcar: no. 1 to Hondori (1 min.); in the Hondori covered shopping arcade 1 block to the east.

①82 **Kushinobo** ★★ KUSHIYAKI This is a friendly, rub-elbows-with-the-locals kind of place, lively and crowded and decorated with Japanese knickknacks. Skewers, prepared at the counter where you can watch, start at ¥140 (\$1.15), but you should expect to pay at least ¥3,000 (\$25) for dinner with drinks (there is a menu in English.). I enjoyed the Kushinobo-gozen with 10 skewers of vegetables, meat, and seafood plus fresh vegetables, rice, soup, and dessert.

Parco-mae, 7-4 Horikawa-cho. ☎ 082/245-9300. Reservations recommended. Skewers ¥140–¥450 (\$1.15–\$3.75); set dinner ¥2,200–¥5,000 (\$18–\$42); set lunch ¥830–¥1,280 (\$6.90–\$11). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–10pm. Streetcar: 1, 2, or 6 to Hatchobori (2 min.). Walk south on Chuo Dori 3 blocks and turn right into a covered shopping arcade; take the 1st left and then the 1st right. It's on the north side of Parco.

Masui *Value* STEAKS/SHABU-SHABU/SUKIYAKI In business more than 50 years, this very popular restaurant around the corner from the Silk Plaza Hotel in the middle of town has its own butcher shop and offers great bargains: individual-size portions of shabu-shabu or sukiyaki start at only ¥900 (\$7.50) for pork and ¥1,600 (\$13) for beef. Unsurprisingly, this two-story restaurant is especially crowded during lunchtime, when it churns out plate after plate of teishoku specials. The ¥750 (\$6.25) teishoku gets you a hamburger patty, ham, omelet, pork cutlet, and rice, but you can forgo the hamburger and get the tonkatsu teishoku with rice for just ¥350 (\$2.90). Masui has recently gone big time with a new sign outside advertising SUKIYAKI AND FOREIGN FOODS and an English-language menu, but I find it's still the same.

14-13 Hatchobori. ☎ 082/227-2983. Set meal ¥900–¥4,000 (\$7.50–\$33); lunch teishoku full meals from ¥500 (\$4.15). No credit cards. Thurs–Tues 11am–8:20pm (last order). Closed 2nd Tues each month. Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to Hatchobori (2 min.). Walk north on Hakushima Dori and take the 1st left; it's on the right.

①83 **Okonomi-Mura** ★★ *Finds* OKONOMIYAKI Although the people of Osaka claim to have made okonomiyaki popular among the masses, the people

of Hiroshima claim to have made it an art. Okonomiyaki is a kind of Japanese pancake filled with cabbage, meat, and other fillings. Whereas in Osaka the ingredients are mixed together, in Hiroshima each layer is prepared separately, which means the chefs have to be quite skilled at keeping the whole thing together. This is the best place in town to witness these short-order cooks at their trade, although the building doesn't look as though it contains restaurants. Its name means "okonomiyaki village," and that's what it is—floors of individual stalls, dishing out okonomiyaki (the food still remains a dish for the masses). All okonomiyaki stalls offer basically the same menu—sit down at one of the counters and watch how the chef first spreads pancake mix on a hot griddle; follows it with a layer of cabbage, bean sprouts, and bacon; and then adds an egg on top. If you want, you can have yours with *udon* (thick wheat noodles) or *soba* (thin buckwheat noodles). The portion sizes are enormous.

Wander through the area and stop at a stall that catches your fancy. Or, for a specific recommendation, try **Chii-chan** (☎ 082/249-8102), on the second floor. It stays open until 2am (closed on Tues) and has an English-language menu. Chii-chan and his female staff sell between 200 and 500 okonomiyaki a day. It's certainly one of Hiroshima's most beloved establishments.

5-13 Shintenchii. ☎ 082/241-8758. Set meal ¥700 – ¥1,300 (\$5.85–\$11). No credit cards. Daily 11am–9pm, but some stalls stay open to 2am. Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to Hatchobori (2 min.). Walk south on Chuo Dori 4 blocks (you'll see Wiz Wonderland on the corner) and turn right.

(184) Suishin ★★ RICE CASSEROLES This is the main shop of a locally owned restaurant chain specializing in *kamameshi* (rice casseroles). First opened in 1950, the chain now has five locations in Hiroshima alone. The main shop, in the middle of town 1 block north of Hondori, has five floors of dining, and though the decor is rather simple, Suishin is very popular for its rice casseroles topped with such Hiroshima delicacies as oysters, mushrooms, sea bream, sea eels, shrimp, and chestnuts. It sells about 800 kamameshi per day, a number that swells to as many as 2,000 on Sunday. To deal with the demand, the owner invented his own conveyor-belt oven, which could cook 180 kamameshi in an hour. Nowadays, kamameshi are prepared fresh with each order. If you want a substantial meal, order the ¥3,000 (\$25) set meal from the English-language menu, which comes with tempura and other side dishes. Other dishes include oysters, eel, grilled fish, and sardines. Lunch specials change daily.

6-7 Tatemachi. ☎ 082/247-4411. Main dishes ¥1,000 – ¥2,500 (\$5–\$21); *kamameshi* (rice casserole) ¥700 (\$5.85); set lunch ¥800 – ¥1,500 (\$6.65–\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Thurs–Tues 11:30am–10pm (last order 9pm). Streetcar: no. 1, 2, or 6 to Tatemachi (2 min.). Walk 3 blocks south to the post office and turn left.

(185) Sushi Tei ★ (Value) SUSHI Excellent sushi at reasonable prices is the reason this establishment is so popular. You'll be seated at the counters, as cooks shout greetings and orders back and forth. Ordering is made easy by an English-language menu. There are many other Sushi Tei restaurants in town, including one near Okonomi-mura, but this is perhaps the most convenient, since it is near the A-Bomb Dome, 1 block south of Aioi Dori between the Kamiyacho and Genbaku-Dome-mae stops.

1-4-31 Nako Otemachi, Naka-ku ☎ 082/545-1333. 1 piece sushi ¥80 – ¥500 (65¢–\$4.15); sushi set ¥800 – ¥1,500 (\$6.65–\$13). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 5pm–midnight; Sun and holidays noon–10pm. Streetcar: 1, 2, or 6 to Kamiyacho (1 min.).

Tandoor INDIAN The Pacela Building, part of the fancy Motomachi Cred (pronounced *Kuredo* in Japanese) complex, has some 30 food-and-beverage outlets, including this one with a welcoming, English-speaking staff. It specializes

in tandoori, including tandoori prawns, kabobs, and chicken, as well as curries and breads. Note that the least expensive curry set lunch is not available on weekends and holidays.

Motomachi Cred complex, 7th floor of Pacela, 6–78 Motomachi. ☎ 082/502-3371. Curries ¥950–¥1,150 (\$7.90–\$9.55); set lunch ¥690–¥1,680 (\$5.75–\$14); set dinner ¥2,000–¥5,000 (\$17–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–3pm and 5–9:30pm; Sat–Sun 11am–9:30pm. Streetcar: 1, 2, or 6 to Kamiyacho (1 min.); follow the signs to the Atram Line and take the exit on your left.

12 Miyajima, Scenic Island in the Seto Sea ★★

13km (8 miles) SW of Hiroshima

Easily reached in about 30 minutes from Hiroshima, **Miyajima** is a treasure of an island only 2km (1¼ miles) off the mainland in the Seto Inland Sea. No doubt you've seen pictures of its most famous landmark—a huge red *torii*, or shrine gate, rising out of the water. Erected in 1875 and made of camphor wood, it's one of the largest torii in Japan, measuring more than 16m (53 ft.) tall. It guards Miyajima's main attraction, Itsukushima Shrine.

With the Japanese penchant for categorizing the “three best” of virtually everything in their country—the three best gardens, the three best waterfalls, and so on—it's no surprise that Miyajima is ranked as one of the three most scenic spots in Japan (the other two are Matsushima in Tohoku; and Amanohashidate, a remote sand spit, on the Japan Sea coast). Only 31 sq. km (12 sq. miles) in area and consisting mostly of steep, wooded hills, it's an exceptionally beautiful island, part of the Seto-Naikai (Inland Sea) National Park that is mostly water, islands, and islets. Of course, this distinction means it can be quite crowded with visitors, particularly in summer.

Miyajima has been held sacred since ancient times. In the olden days, no one was allowed to do anything so human as to give birth or die on the island, so both the pregnant and the ill were quickly ferried across to the mainland. Even today there's no cemetery on Miyajima. Covered with cherry trees that illuminate the island with snowy petals in spring, and with maple trees that emblazon it in reds and golds in autumn, Miyajima is home to tame deer that roam freely through the village, and to monkeys that swing through the woods. It's a delightful island for strolls and hikes—but avoid coming on a weekend.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The easiest way to get to Miyajima is from Hiroshima. You can travel from Hiroshima by JR train, streetcar, or bus, but the fastest and most convenient method is the **train**, which departs from Hiroshima Station approximately every 6 to 30 minutes, depending on the time of the day, and costs ¥400 (\$3.35; free for JR Rail Pass holders) for the 26-minute ride to Miyajimaguchi. Otherwise, a **streetcar** takes about an hour from Hiroshima Station to Hiroden Miyajima, the last stop, and costs ¥270 (\$2.25). All modes of transportation deposit you at Miyajimaguchi, from which it's just a couple minutes' walk to the **ferry** bound for Miyajima. There are two ferry companies offering the 10-minute ride to Miyajima for ¥170 (\$1.40), but if you have a **Japan Rail Pass**, you can ride on the JR ferry for free.

VISITOR INFORMATION On Miyajima, stop off at the **Tourist Information Office** (☎ 0829/44-2011; open daily 9am–5pm) located in the Miyajima ferry terminal. It has a brochure in English with a map, and the staff can also make reservations for accommodations. Some English is spoken, and they are helpful and will show you where your accommodations are on the map. For

¥300 (\$2.50) you can rent an audio guide that describes in English the 20 places of interest noted on a companion map—a great convenience. For more information, visit www.hiroshima-cdas.or.jp/miyajima/top2.htm.

GETTING AROUND You can **walk** to all the sights, accommodations, and restaurants listed below. If you wish to visit one of the island's beaches or explore more of the island, rental **bicycles** are available at the JR ferry pier 8am to 5pm costing ¥320 (\$2.65) for 2 hours or ¥1,050 (\$8.75) for the whole day. Inquire at the JR ticket window. Otherwise, shuttle **buses** travel to the beaches once or twice an hour in July and every 15 minutes in August for ¥300 (\$2.50). Ask the Tourist Information Office for a schedule.

EXPLORING THE ISLAND

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Miyajima's major attraction, **Itsukushima Shrine** 厳島神社, 1-1 Miyajima-cho (☎ 0829/44-2020), is less than a 10-minute walk from the ferry pier (turn right from the terminal), along a narrow street lined with souvenir shops and restaurants. Founded back in 592 to honor three female deities, the wooden shrine is built over the water so that, when the tide is in, it appears as though the shrine is floating. A brilliant vermilion, it contrasts starkly with the wooded hills in the background and the blue of the sky above, casting its reflection in the waters below. If you do happen to see Itsukushima Shrine when the tide is in and it's seemingly floating on water, you should consider yourself very lucky indeed—most of the time the lovely shrine floats above a surface that's only a little more glamorous than mud. That's when imagination comes in handy (the Hiroshima tourist offices may have a tide calendar).

The majority of the shrine buildings are thought to date from the 16th century, preserving the original style of 12th-century architecture, but they have been repaired repeatedly through the centuries. Most of the shrine buildings are closed, but from sunrise to sunset daily (usually 6:30am–6pm in summer, to 5pm in winter), you can walk along the 231m (770-ft.) covered **dock**, which threads its way past the outer part of the main shrine and the oldest Noh stage in Japan. From the shrine, you'll have a good view of the red torii standing in the water. **Bugaku** (festival dances) are staged here 10 times a year (expect those days to be crowded with tour groups). An ancient dance performed to the accompaniment of court music, Bugaku was introduced to Japan centuries ago from India through China and Korea. The performer's costume is orange, matching the shrine around him. If you wish to plan your visit to coincide with festival dances, check with the tourist office or go to the website (see "Visitor Information," above) and click on "Seasonal Events." Admission to the shrine is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for college and high-school students, ¥100 (85¢) for children.

Turn right upon exiting the shrine. After a few minutes, you'll come to the island's most interesting museum, the **Miyajima Municipal History and Folklore Museum (Rekishhi Minzoku Shiryokan)** 厳島市歴史民俗資料館, 57 Miyajima-cho (☎ 0829/44-2019; open Tues–Sun 8:30am–5pm). It has a colorful brochure in English to guide you through the 170-year-old house (which once belonged to a wealthy soy-sauce merchant and is built around a small Japanese garden), as well as through several other buildings. Packed with items donated by the people of Miyajima, the museum is a window into commoners' daily lives in ages past, with farm tools, water jars, cooking objects, carved-wood boxes, furniture, lacquerware, combs, and much more. Be sure to see the narrow, three-room

dwelling in the back of the museum complex, typical of the island. Admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥170 (\$1.40) for high-school students, and ¥150 (\$1.25) for junior-high and elementary students. It will take about 30 minutes to see everything.

ENJOYING MIYAJIMA'S NATURAL WORLD

The other popular thing to do on Miyajima is to visit its highest peak, 525m (1,750-ft.) **Mount Misen**. Signs direct you to Momijidani Park, a pleasant hillside park covered with maple trees (spectacular in autumn) and cherry trees (heavenly in spring) and marked by a picturesque stream. From here, you can take cable cars to Mount Misen; round-trip tickets cost ¥1,700 (\$14) for adults, ¥1,250 (\$10) for students, and ¥850 (\$7.10) for children. However, you might wish to enjoy some of the scenery by walking back down, in which case one-way tickets cost ¥1,000 (\$8.35), ¥750 (\$6.25), and ¥500 (\$4.15) respectively. In any case, the summit of Mount Misen, a 15-minute walk from the cable car station, offers splendid views of the Seto-Naikai (Inland Sea) National Park, and Mount Misen itself is home to much of the island's wild monkey population.

Miyajima is also known for its beaches. If you're looking to swim, there are two beaches west of the town and shrine: **Suginoura** and **Tsutsumigaura Natural Park** (you can also camp here). Ask at the tourist office for a schedule of shuttle buses that will bring you to the beaches.

WHERE TO STAY

You can see Miyajima easily on a side trip from Hiroshima, but because it's such a beautiful respite from city life and because most tourists are day-trippers, you'll enjoy the island much more if you stay behind after the last ferry leaves. An added benefit of a longer stay: Itsukushima Shrine is illuminated at night, a gorgeous sight overnights should not miss. I've therefore included a few recommendations on where to stay, but avoid Golden Week and weekends in July, August, October, and November (when maple leaves are in full color), since accommodations are usually full.

(186) Guest House Kikugawa ★ Located in a quiet residential neighborhood an easy walk from the ferry pier, this guesthouse is modern yet adheres to traditional Japanese design with its whitewashed walls, dark timber framing, white paper lanterns, and simple elegance. The owner, Kikugawa-san, speaks English and is an accomplished chef, serving French food with a Japanese twist in his pleasant restaurant with a restful view of a maple tree (advance reservations required). Six of the guest rooms are Western style and are rather ordinary, reflected in the cheaper room rates below. The two other more expensive rooms face the front and boast flowers, bilingual TV, and washlet toilet; the smaller is a tatami room, while the larger has a tatami area and a loft with Western-style beds. Since this place is small, make reservations 6 months in advance if you want to stay here in July, August, October, or November.

796 Miyajimacho, Saeki-gun, Hiroshima-ken 739-0511. ☎ 0829/44-0039. Fax 0829/44-2773. www.kikugawa.ne.jp. 8 units. ¥6,800 (\$57) single; ¥12,000 – ¥14,000 (\$100–\$117) twin/double; ¥15,000 – ¥19,000 (\$125–\$158) triple. ¥1,000 (\$8.35) more per person in peak season. Breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra; dinner ¥3,500 and ¥5,000 (\$29 and \$42) extra. AE, DC, MC, V.A 3-min. walk from the ferry terminal; walk through the short tunnel in front of the terminal and turn right. Look for the GUESTHOUSE sign. **Amenities:** Restaurant; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

(187) Iwaso Ryokan ★★ ★ *Finds* This is the most famous ryokan on the island, and with a history spanning more than 145 years, it was also the first ryokan to

open on Miyajima, which explains its idyllic location in Momijidani Park. It's highly recommended for a splurge, with the price dependent on the room, its view, and the meals you select (when booking your room, be sure to specify any dietary needs such as vegetarian food only, whether you want a Western breakfast, or whether there are Japanese foods you cannot eat). The newest part of the ryokan was built in 1981, and though some of its newer rooms have very peaceful and relaxing views of a stream and woods, I prefer the rooms dating from about 70 years ago; they have more individuality. If you really want to go all out and live in style, there are also a couple of separate cottages (*hanare*) that are more than 80 years old, all exquisitely decorated and with old wooden tubs. Open your shoji screens to see maples, a gurgling brook, and woods, all in utter privacy. You'll be treated like royalty here, but of course you have to pay for it.

Momijidani, 345 Miyajimacho, Saeki-gun, Hiroshima-ken 739-0522. ☎ 0829/44-2233. Fax 0829/44-2230. 44 units (36 with bathroom). ¥21,000–¥40,000 (\$175–\$333) per person. Cottage ¥35,000–¥40,000 (\$291–\$333) per person. Rates may be higher during peak season and nights before holidays. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. AE, V. A 15-min. walk from the ferry pier in Momijidani Park. Pickup service available. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

①88 **Miyajima Morinoyado** ★★ *Value* You're forgiven if you pass this place by, thinking it must be an exclusive ryokan. Indeed, if it weren't a municipally owned Kokumin Shukusha (People's Lodge), rates here would easily be three times as much as they are. Though modern, it has a lovely Japanese design with a lobby overlooking a carp pond. On the other hand, the many school groups and families staying here leave no doubt that it's a public lodge, and it's quite a hike from the ferry pier. Both tatami rooms and Western-style twins—simple but spacious and spotless—are available, some with views of the bay. The public baths look onto rock gardens. Although the local tourist office may indicate that the facility isn't really for foreigners ("because they won't be able to understand the Japanese way of doing things"), and not much English is spoken, it's worth persisting. Reservations should be made 1 year in advance, especially for August. The front desk is receptive to foreigners, and sometimes there are cancellations; when I dropped by on a weekday in June, rooms were available. Both Western and Japanese breakfasts are available; dinners are Japanese.

Miyajimacho, Saeki-gun, Hiroshima-ken 739-0500. ☎ 0829/44-0430. Fax 0829/44-2248. 30 units (26 with bathroom, 4 with toilet only). ¥4,300 (\$36) per person without bathroom; ¥4,800 (\$40) per person with bathroom (add ¥1,000/\$8.35 for single occupancy). ¥700 (\$5.85) more per person on Sat, nights before holidays, and during peak season (Apr, May, July, and Aug). Discounts given for children. Breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra; dinner ¥2,000–¥5,000 (\$17–\$42) extra. No credit cards. A 25-min. walk from the ferry pier, across from the aquarium and just before the tunnel. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); Jacuzzi. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Momiji-so ★★ This small, Japanese-style house has a great location in Momijidani Park, not far from the ropeway to Mount Misen, and has been in business for 85 years. Tatami rooms vary in size, though all have artwork, flowers, and views of the surrounding park; the best looks out over a koi pond. A plus is the nice outdoor Japanese restaurant serving noodles, barbecued conger eel on rice, and other dishes—weather permitting, you'll dine outside. Not much English is spoken, but they're used to foreigners and are very kind.

Momijidani-koennai, Miyajimacho, Saeki-gun, Hiroshima-ken 739-0500. ☎ 0829/44-0077. Fax 0829/44-0076. www.gambo-ad.com. 7 units (2 with bathroom). ¥8,000 (\$67) per person. Rates include breakfast. Dinner ¥3,000–¥5,000 (\$25–\$42) extra. No credit cards. A 25-min. walk from the ferry pier in Momijidani Park. Pickup service available.

WHERE TO DINE

Note: There are no addresses in this section, because the village is small, and the address would only be meaningful to the postman.

①89 **Fujitaya** ★★ *Finds* ANAGOMESHI Although the building itself is not old, this pleasant restaurant has a history of more than 80 years and preserves a traditional atmosphere with its wooden ceiling, shoji lamps, and a back courtyard with a maple tree, moss-covered rocks, and water running from a bamboo pipe into a pool carved into a flat rock. Fujitaya serves only *anagomeshi* (barbecued conger eel on rice), which comes with side dishes (such as pickled vegetables), soup, and tea. It closes when it runs out of anago.

☎ 0829/44-0151. Anagomeshi teishoku ¥2,300 (\$19). No credit cards. Mon–Fri 11am–3pm; Sat–Sun 11am–5pm. A 20-min. walk from the ferry pier, on the right side of the road leading toward Daishoin after exiting from Itsukushima Shrine. Look for its name written on an oversize paddle.

①90 **Komitei** ★ OKONOMIYAKI Convenient to the ferry pier, this simple restaurant with counter, table, and tatami dining stays open later than most restaurants on the island and is one of the cleanest okonomiyaki restaurants we've seen. Both Hiroshima-style (which is prepared for you) and Kansai-style (which you prepare yourself) okonomiyaki are available from the English-language menu.

☎ 0829/44-0177. Okonomiyaki ¥700–¥900 (\$5.85–\$7.50); set meal ¥1,000–¥1,200 (\$8.35–\$10). No credit cards. Thurs–Tues 11am–2:30pm and 5–9pm. A 1-min. walk from the ferry pier, catty-corner to the right.

①91 **Tonookajaya** NOODLES Dine inside or out at this tiny teahouselike shop next to the five-story pagoda. The shop serves mostly udon (thick wheat noodles), including udon with tempura, but it also offers sticky rice cakes (*omochi chikara*); and a sweet rice porridge (*amazake*) is served October to May. What makes this place especially interesting is the 200-year-old pine tree out front that has been guided through the centuries to attain its unique, horizontal shape. You can also come here just for drinks.

☎ 0829/44-2455. Main dishes ¥580–¥750 (\$4.80–\$6.25). No credit cards. Daily 10am–5pm. A 10-min. walk from the ferry pier on the hill with the 5-story pagoda, facing away from Itsukushima Shrine.

Shikoku

The smallest of Japan's four main islands, Shikoku is also the one least visited by foreigners. That's surprising considering the natural beauty of its rugged mountains, its mild climate, and its most famous monuments—88 sacred Buddhist temples. Many Japanese wish to make a pilgrimage to all 88 temples at least once in their lifetime as a tribute to the great Buddhist priest Kobo Daishi, who was born on Shikoku in 774 and who founded the Shingon sect of Buddhism.

This pilgrimage has been popular since the Edo Period in the belief that a successful completion of the tour exonerates Buddhist followers from rebirth. It used to take a couple months to visit all 88 temples on foot. Even today, you can see pilgrims making their rounds dressed in white—only now they go mostly by organized tour buses, which cut travel time down to 2 weeks.

GETTING TO SHIKOKU For centuries, the only way to reach Shikoku

was by boat. However, the 1988 completion of the Seto Ohashi Bridge, which links Shikoku with Okayama Prefecture and accommodates both cars and trains, changed Shikoku forever. And in 1999, a series of bridges connecting Shikoku with Hiroshima Prefecture and spanning six scenic islands in the Seto Inland Sea opened with fanfare. Complete with cycling paths offering views of the islands and the Seto Inland Sea, the 1999 bridges have since become one of Shikoku's hottest attractions. A third bridge, for cars only, connects Shikoku with Kobe.

In any case, Shikoku is no longer as far off the beaten track as it used to be, simply because access is so easy. Shinkansen travelers can simply transfer in Okayama to trains bound for either Takamatsu or Matsuyama. The energetic can cycle all the way from Hiroshima Prefecture to Ehime Prefecture if you wish.

1 Takamatsu ★

805km (500 miles) W of Tokyo; 71km (44 miles) S of Okayama

The second-largest town on Shikoku, with a population of 330,000, Takamatsu, the capital of Kagawa Prefecture, is on the northeastern coast of the island, overlooking the Seto Inland Sea. Takamatsu means "high pine," and the city served as the feudal capital of the powerful Matsudaira clan from 1642 until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. The Matsudairas are responsible for Takamatsu's most famous site, Ritsurin Park, one of the most outstanding gardens in Japan. Takamatsu also boasts more bonsai nurseries than anywhere else in Japan, while nearby is Kotohiragu Shrine, a popular mountaintop destination that requires a real workout just to see.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane Flying time is 1 hour and 20 minutes from Tokyo's Haneda Airport (¥22,500/\$188 for a one-way ticket), 1 hour and 10

minutes from Fukuoka on Kyushu island, and 1 hour and 50 minutes from Sapporo on Hokkaido. An airport bus delivers passengers downtown in about 45 minutes for ¥740 (\$6.20).

By Train JR's **Marine Liner** trains depart from Okayama Station approximately twice an hour, reaching Takamatsu in an hour; the fare is ¥1,470 (\$12). From Matsuyama, trains take less than 2½ hours and cost ¥5,500 (\$46).

By Bus Buses depart from Tokyo Station nightly at 8:20pm, reaching Takamatsu at 5:55am the next day. One-way fare is ¥10,000 (\$83). There are also night buses from Shinjuku.

By Boat **Hydrofoils** connect Takamatsu with Osaka in 3 hours and cost ¥5,800 (\$48) one-way. Boats dock at piers just a few minutes' walk from Takamatsu Station and Kotoden Chikko Station (terminus of the local streetcar).

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Takamatsu Information Plaza** (☎ 087/851-2009; open daily 9am–6pm), located outside the main exit of the train station in a small building toward the left beside a circular plaza, offers an English-language map of the city and the Kagawa Welcome Card, a free mini-guide complete with a discount card offering reduced rates for participating hotels, shops, restaurants, and attractions. Information is also available online at www.city.takamatsu.kagawa.jp/english.

If you crave a bit of news from home or plan to remain in the area, head for **I-Pal Kagawa**, 1–11–63 Bancho (☎ 087/837-5908; open Tues–Sun 9am–6pm), located about a 15-minute walk south of Takamatsu Station on Chuo Dori in the northwest corner of Central (Chuo) Park. Here you'll find magazines and newspapers in many languages, CNN on the tube, and two computers you can use free of charge for 30 minutes. This is also a good place to find out what's going on in the area and to pick up an even better map.

INTERNET ACCESS Since I-Pal Kagawa, above, has only two computers, you might be better off going to **Queensberry@Café**, 1–10–4 Tokiwa-cho (☎ 087/812-0680), across from Kotoden Kawaramachi Station's west exit (follow signs saying BUS STOP and then look for the café's sign to the left). It's open daily 11am to midnight and charges ¥100 (85¢) for 1 hour when you order a drink.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND Takamatsu Station, the city's ferry pier, and the local streetcar terminus are clustered at the north edge of the city on the coast of the Seto Inland Sea. All the hotels and restaurants listed below, as well as Ritsurin Park, are located south and southeast of the train station. **Chuo Dori** is the town's main avenue, running south from the train station to Ritsurin Park and beyond. Bisecting Chuo Dori and paralleling it to the east are 2.5km (1½ miles) of shopping arcade, which the city claims is the longest in Japan. (Several cities, however, make that claim.)

Although the main attractions of Takamatsu are spread out, they're easily reached from Takamatsu Station by **JR train** or by a commuter streetcar called the **Kotoden Line**. The Kotoden streetcar terminus, called **Kotoden Chikko Station**, is a 2-minute walk from Takamatsu Station's main exit, past the ANA hotel and to the right. Two stops south on the Kotoden streetcar (or a 25-min. walk from Takamatsu Station) is **Kawaramachi Station**, where you'll find many department stores, restaurants, and nightspots.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Ritsurin Park ★★☆☆ Ritsurin Park was once the summer retreat of the Matsudaira family. Work on the park began in the 1600s and took about 100 years to

complete. Using the backdrop of adjacent Mount Shiun in a principle known as “borrowed landscaping,” the 54-hectare (134-acre) park incorporates the mountain into its overall design. Basically, the garden can be divided into two parts: a traditional, classical, southern garden; and a modern, northern garden, once a lord’s private hunting grounds and with wide grassy lawns and huge lotus ponds.

The **southern garden** is the more interesting. Arranged around the prescribed six ponds and 13 scenic mounds, it represents what’s called a strolling garden, in which each bend of the footpath brings another perspective into view, another combination of rock, tree, and mountain. The garden is absolutely exquisite, and what sets it apart are its twisted, contorted pines. On one of my visits, a mist was rolling off Mount Shiun, lending mystery to the landscape; what better fits the image of traditional Japan than mist and pine trees? Altogether, there are 1,400 pine trees and 350 cherry trees in Ritsurin Park, which you should tour in a counterclockwise fashion to fully appreciate the changing views. Although I consider this garden just as beautiful as those in Okayama and Kanazawa, tall buildings on its eastern periphery detract from its overall effect; without them I would give this garden top rating.

There are a couple of things you can stop and see during your tour of the park. In the northern garden are the **Sanuki Folk Art Museum (Sanuki Mingei Kan)**, which is included in the park’s admission fee and displays local folk art and handicrafts such as ceramics, lacquerware, furniture, and items used in daily Edo life; and the **Commerce and Industry Hall (ShokoShorei-kan)**, which sells local products, including kites, masks, wood carvings, umbrellas, fans, and food items. But my favorite thing to do is drop by **Kikugetsu-tei (Scooping the Moon House)** in the southern garden, with its teahouse dating from feudal days overlooking a pond. Powdered tea, used in tea ceremonies, costs ¥710 (\$5.90) for adults and ¥550 (\$4.60) for children. It takes about an hour to see the southern garden; add another half-hour if you also take in the northern garden.

1–20–16 Ritsurin-cho. ☎ 087/833-7411. Admission ¥400 (\$3.35) adults, ¥170 (\$1.40) children. 20% discount available with the Kagawa Welcome Card. Daily sunrise–sunset (approximately 7am–5pm in winter, 5:30am–7pm June–Aug). Kotoden streetcar: Ritsurin-koen Station (10 min.). JR train: If you have a Japan Rail Pass, go by JR train toward Tokushima; get off at Ritsurin-koen Kita Guchi, turn right out of the station, follow the tracks to the 1st street, and turn right (4 min.).

Shikoku Mura Village ★★ On the northeastern edge of town, this open-air museum boasts more than 20 traditional houses, sheds, and storehouses dating from the Edo Period and collected from all over Shikoku. The structures, picturesquely situated on the wooded slope of Yashima Hill, include thatch-roofed homes of farmers and fishermen, century-old cottages used by lighthouse keepers, a rustic tea-ceremony house, a 250-year-old rural Kabuki stage, rice and soy-sauce storehouses, and sheds for pressing sugar and for producing paper out of mulberry bark. There’s also a suspended bridge made of vines, once a familiar sight in Shikoku as a means for crossing the island’s many gorges and ravines—if you look closely, however, you’ll see that this one is reinforced by cables.

It takes at least an hour to stroll through the village (and there are lots of stairs). I heartily recommend a visit if you haven’t had the opportunity to see similar villages in Takayama, Shirakawago, or Kawasaki, since they convey better than anything else rural life in Japan in centuries past. Also in Shikoku Mura is the **Shikoku Mura Gallery**, designed by famed Japanese architect Tadao Ando and displaying mostly 19th- and 20th-century French paintings (works by Renoir and Bonnard are especially significant), calligraphy, Chinese Buddhist images, and ancient glassware, earthenware, and bronze mirrors. It’s open daily

Finds **Bonsai is Big in Kinashi**

If you've long admired the art of **bonsai**—the crafting of miniature pines and other trees through skillful manipulation—you might wish to take a stroll through **Kinashi**, a western suburb of Takamatsu. With more than 100 nurseries, most of them cultivating bonsai, Kinashi has been a center of bonsai since the Edo Period and remains the largest bonsai-growing region in Japan. To reach it, take a local JR train from Takamatsu Station two stations to Kinashi, walk north a few minutes, and then turn right onto Bonsai Street. One of the largest nurseries, ⁽¹⁹²⁾ **Kandaka-Shoju-en** (☎ 087/881-2852), will soon be on your right. It's owned by a fourth-generation bonsai cultivator; some of the larger pines here were started by his ancestors. You're welcome to walk through this and other nearby nurseries. From here, take the first right and then the next right again. This is the only place I've ever seen bonsai groves, with hundreds of tiny pine trees planted in rows. If you continue straight, you'll come back to Kinashi Station.

9am to 5:30pm (to 6pm in summer). Admission here is an extra ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for children.

91 Yashima-naka-machi. ☎ 087/843-3111. Admission ¥800 (\$6.65) adults, ¥500 (\$4.15) high-school students, ¥400 (\$3.35) junior-high students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Daily 8:30am–4:30pm (to 5pm in summer). ¥100 (85¢) discount with Kagawa Welcome Card. Kotoden streetcar: To Kotoden Yashima Station, about a 20-min. ride and then a 5-min. walk. JR train: Take a JR train bound for Tokushima and get off at Yashima Station (15-min.).

AN EASY SIDE TRIP FROM TAKAMATSU

If you're spending more than a day in Takamatsu, this major attraction in the surrounding countryside is worth the trek.

KOTOHIRA ★★ If you have 4 hours to spare, one of the best historical side trips you can take is to Kotohira, home of Japan's oldest Kabuki theater and of **Kotohiragu Shrine** ★★, 892 Kotohira-cho (☎ 0877/75-2121), one of Japan's oldest and most popular shrines. It takes about an hour to reach Kotohira by JR train from Takamatsu, but that isn't the end of it—the shrine itself is at the top of 785 granite steps, which on average take 40 minutes to ascend. If that's too much for you, you can hire one of the porters who wait at the bottom of the steps; they'll take you only to the main gate (called *Omon* in Japanese), which is reached after climbing 365 steps. The cost of riding in one of these palanquins is ¥5,000 (\$42) one-way and ¥6,500 (\$54) if you're carried back down. What decadence.

Otherwise, begin the long trek up to Kotohiragu Shrine by taking the JR Kotohira Station's only exit. Walk straight past a small park (with a wooden tower that served as a beacon for traveling pilgrims in the Edo Period), and pass the Kotoden Station. (You can also travel from Takamatsu in 1 hr. by Kotoden streetcar.) Turn left at the T-junction with a post office. You'll soon see, to the right, a sloping, narrow street lined with souvenir shops (though I wouldn't buy anything on the way up). Eventually, you'll reach the first flight of stairs. If you're making a detour to the Kabuki theater (described below), turn left after the 22nd step, from which the theater is only a 3-minute walk.

At about the 475th step (in case you're counting), just past the stables to the right, you'll find **Shoin**, built in 1659 to receive important visitors. Its doors and alcoves contain paintings by Maruyama Okyo, a famous 18th-century landscape

artist, making the building an Important Cultural Property. Especially famous is the painting of two tigers drinking from a stream. It's open daily from 8:30am to 4:30pm; admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for students, and free for children. After another 15-minute workout, you'll reach the **main shrine**, where you'll be rewarded with a sweeping view of the surrounding countryside as well as of the shrine itself. Popularly known as Kompira-San, Kotohiragu Shrine was originally founded in the 11th century but has been rebuilt many times, with the main shrine buildings re-erected about 100 years ago. It's dedicated to the Shinto god of seafarers and voyagers (look for the Votive Picture Pavilion with photos of ships and other vessels that have asked for blessings) and, in recent years, has even become revered as the protector of foreign travelers. For my part, I was thankful just that I traveled the stairs to the shrine. And to be honest, the shrine itself is not the main draw; most of the four million annual hikers, it seems, come for the hike itself and the comradeship it inspires. If you're still game (and want to say you went the whole distance), you can continue another 583 steps to Okunoyashiro Inner Shrine, which is a small building closed to the public.

Since you're in the vicinity, you should make every effort to see the highly recommended (193) **Kompira Grand Playhouse (Kompira O-Shibai** or Kanamaruza) ★, 241 Otsu, Kotohira-cho (☎ 0877/73-3846), which was built to entertain the masses flocking to Kotohiragu Shrine. Located near the beginning of the many steps to the shrine—to the left as you approach and then up the hill to the right—it's the oldest existing Kabuki stage in Japan, stunning in its simplicity and delightful in its construction. Since there was no electricity when it was built in 1835, the sides of the hall are rows of shoji screens and wooden coverings, which can be opened and closed to control the amount of light reaching the stage. Notice the tatami seating, the paper lanterns, and the revolving stage, which was turned by eight men in the basement. You can also tour the various make-up and dressing rooms behind the stage and watch a video in Japanese. Actual Kabuki plays are staged once a year, in April, when you can see Edo-Period pieces. As you may well imagine, tickets are hard to come by. Otherwise, the stage is open for general viewing daily from 9am to 5pm and charges an admission of ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for junior-high and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children. Ask for the English-language handout.

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE

ANA Hotel Clement Takamatsu ★★ Opened in 2001 across from Takamatsu Station (and offering a discount to holders of a Japan Rail Pass), the city's most expensive hotel is also its most conspicuous—sleek, 21 stories high, cutting across the landscape like a white sail, and by far the best place in town. It's

Fun Fact Doggedly Faithful

In the olden days, faithful who could not manage a trip to Kotohiragu Shrine in person would set a barrel adrift at sea, along with an offering and a plea for passing fishermen to take the offering to the shrine on their next pilgrimage. The more resourceful would even send dogs on the pilgrimage, with a tag that read "Kotohira Pilgrimage" and a pouch of money around their necks. Travelers who encountered the dogs used the money to buy the animals food and passage on boats until the dogs reached their destination.

designed with an aquatic theme, with a cascading fountain in the sunlit lobby lounge, carpets with wavy patterns, bubbled or crackled glass in public places, and curving, seductive lines everywhere, even in corridors. It's the kind of place sightseers happily return to after a hard day's work. Room rates are based on size, view, and amenities, with the best twin and double rooms offering views of the sea or nearby Tamamo Park, even from windows in the bathroom. But the least expensive rooms are also recommendable—spacious and chic with contemporary furnishings and good bedside reading lamps; ask for a room on the highest available floor.

1-1 Hamano-cho, Takamatsu 760-0011. ☎ 087/811-1111. Fax 087/811-1100. www.anahotels.com. 300 units. ¥10,500–¥14,000 (\$88–\$117) single; ¥18,000–¥20,000 (\$150–\$167) double; ¥21,000–¥35,000 (\$175–\$292) twin. 10% off with Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Takamatsu (1 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, Italian, coffee shop); bar; lounge; beer garden; concierge; room service (7–10:30am and 5–11pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry and dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

MODERATE

Rihga Hotel Zest This beige-brick hotel, first opened in 1980 and adding an annex with more luxurious accommodations 10 years later, appeals to both business and leisure travelers with its convenient location on Chuo Dori next to Hyogo-machi shopping arcade. It has an accommodating staff and offers a variety of rooms at different price ranges. The cheapest rooms, including all singles, are located in the main building and are narrow with tiny bathrooms. More expensive annex rooms sport shoji screens and window panels that close for complete darkness. Deluxe rooms offer such extras as hair dryers, washlet toilets, and trouser presses. There are also combination rooms with both tatami areas and beds.

9-1 Furujinmachi, Takamatsu 760-0025. ☎ 087/822-3555. Fax 087/822-7516. www.rihga.com. 122 units. ¥6,800–¥8,200 (\$57–\$68) single; ¥13,000–¥25,000 (\$108–\$208) double; ¥15,000–¥25,000 (\$125–\$208) twin. 10% discounts with the Kagawa Welcome Card; be sure to mention the card when making your reservation and show it when you check in. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Takamatsu (a 10-min. walk south of the station, on Chuo Dori just past Hyogo-machi arcade). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, French, coffee shop); lounge; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea.

Royal Park Hotel Annex This business hotel, with imitation Art Deco decor in its lobby and hallways, offers mostly single rooms in a convenient location near Kawaramachi Station in the heart of the city's shopping and nightlife district. Rooms, though small, are pleasantly decorated, but it's been a while since I've seen pink tiled bathrooms like those here. The cheapest singles are on lower floors where traffic is noisiest. The hotel's seven twins are all corner rooms, bright and large for the price with vanity/sink separate from the—you guessed it—pink bathrooms (which also have a sink). Little English is spoken.

11-1 Fukuda, Takamatsu 760-0048. ☎ 087/823-1111. Fax 087/823-1123. 117 units. ¥4,800–¥6,800 (\$40–\$57) single; ¥12,000 (\$100) double; ¥14,000 (\$117) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Kotoden streetcar: Kawaramachi (5 min.). Take the west exit (in the direction of the bus stop) and walk north on Ferry Dori, turning right at the 1st traffic signal and crossing the tracks; you'll see the hotel on the left. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Chinese); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, washlet toilet, trouser press.

INEXPENSIVE

Parkside Hotel Takamatsu ★ *Value* Japanese women favor this small, boutique-like hotel for its great location across from Ritsurin Park. Rooms are small, but who cares when you can open the window and look out over the fabled garden?

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many hotels, restaurants, attractions, and other establishments in Japan do not have signs giving their names in Roman (English-language) letters. Appendix C lists the Japanese symbols for all such places described in this guide. Each set of characters representing an establishment name has a number in the appendix that corresponds to the number that appears inside the oval before the establishment's name in the text. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, Tenkatsu (below) refer to no. 194 in appendix C.

Some rooms have only a partial view, so be sure to request a ringside seat on an upper floor; although slightly more expensive, it's worth it.

1-3-1 Ritsurin-cho, Takamatsu 760-0073. ☎ 087/837-5555. Fax 087/837-3000. parkside@maill.net-wave.or.jp. 103 units. ¥6,500–¥7,000 (\$54–\$58) single; ¥9,000 (\$75) double; ¥12,000–¥17,000 (\$100–\$142) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Kotoden streetcar: Ritsurin Koen (10 min.). Walk straight from the west exit and turn right on Chuo Dori; the hotel will be on the right. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese noodle shop); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Takamatsu is known throughout Japan for its *sanuki udon*—thick white noodles made from wheat flour. Takamatsu also has a fresh supply of fish from the Seto Inland Sea.

EXPENSIVE

Fiore  **NORTHERN ITALIAN** This 20th-floor, upscale restaurant in the classy ANA Hotel Clement offers dreamy views of the port and the Seto Inland Sea, as well as live piano music to accompany tasty Italian main dishes including fish or meat. If you want, you can come for just a drink in the bar one level higher, which stays open till midnight.

20th floor of ANA Hotel Clement, 1-1 Hamano-cho, Takamatsu 760-0011. ☎ 087/811-1111. Main dishes ¥2,600–¥4,000 (\$22–\$33); set dinner ¥4,000–¥8,000 (\$33–\$67). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–9pm (last order). Station: Takamatsu (1 min.).

MODERATE

 **Tenkatsu**  **TEMPURA/SUSHI** This well-known tempura and sushi restaurant is in a modern-looking building with a plastic-food display case and a window where passersby can watch a chef prepare sushi. Inside the restaurant are tatami mats and tables, but I suggest sitting at the counter, which encircles a large pool filled with fish. As customers order, fish are swept out of the tanks with nets—they certainly couldn't be fresher. There's an English-language menu as well as the display case. If you really want to splurge, order one of the kaiseki courses beginning at ¥5,000 (\$42).

7-8 Hyogo-machi. ☎ 087/821-5380. Reservations recommended; required for kaiseki. Dishes ¥1,000–¥2,500 (\$8.35–\$21); set lunch ¥800–¥2,500 (\$6.65–\$21); set dinner ¥1,500–¥10,000 (\$13–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–2pm and 4–10pm; Sat–Sun 11am–9pm. Station: Takamatsu (a 5-min. walk south from the station). Walk south on Chuo Dori until it intersects with a large covered pedestrian shopping arcade called Hyogo-machi. Turn right and walk all the way through the arcade; upon emerging, you'll find the restaurant on your left.

 **Tokiwa Saryo**   **Finds VARIED JAPANESE** This restaurant, easily spotted with its castlelike roof, occupies what was once a traditional Japanese inn

and retains many of its original traditional features, including a delightful inner courtyard complete with a pond, dwarf pine trees, carp, and some lanterns. You'll probably want to order one of the set meals like obento lunch boxes or tempura and sashimi teishoku, made easy to choose from by photos in the Japanese menu. For dinner, mini-kaiseki meals are also available for ¥2,000 to ¥4,000 (\$17–\$33), though no photos are available for these, as they change with the season. At any rate, the food is delicious and very reasonably priced; you can't go wrong.

1–8–2 Tokiwa-cho. ☎ 087/861-5577. Reservations required. Set meal ¥1,380–¥5,000 (\$12–\$42); set lunch ¥1,000–¥3,000 (\$8.35–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2:30pm and 5–9:30pm (last order). Kotoden streetcar: Kawaramachi Station (2 min.). From the west exit (with its BUS STOP sign), take the side street south (to the left) parallel to Tokiwa-cho (a covered arcade); the restaurant will be on your right, on the corner.

INEXPENSIVE

①96 **Kanaizumi** ★ SANUKI UDON This modern cafeteria is about as casual as you can get—you even heat your own noodles by putting some in a basket of hot water as you go through the line. Tempura (¥80–¥120/65¢–\$1 per piece) is also available, as are oden and soup. If all this is too much work for you, head to the more expensive restaurant on the second floor (its entrance is to the left, beside the display case), where you can order set meals averaging ¥1,000 (\$8.35). At any rate, be prepared for slippery noodles and the good-natured slurping sounds of a noodle shop.

9–3 Konyamachi. ☎ 087/822-0123. Sanuki udon ¥160–¥230 (\$1.35–\$1.90). No credit cards. Daily 7am–5:30pm. Station: Takamatsu (a 15-min. walk south of the station, off Chuo Dori to the left just past the city art museum).

①97 **Maruichi** ★ YAKITORI Although a cozy and friendly drinking establishment, this is also a great place for an inexpensive meal. An English-language menu lists sashimi, *kimchi* (Korean spiced cabbage), pork, tofu, deep-fried prawns and, of course, a variety of yakitori costing ¥100 to ¥350 (85¢–\$2.90) per skewer. An evening of eating, drinking, and merriment here should cost about ¥2,000 (\$17) per person, including the obligatory ¥280 (\$2.35) snack charge.

1–4–13 Tokiwa-cho. ☎ 087/861-7623. Main dishes ¥450–¥650 (\$3.75–\$5.40); set meal ¥2,500–¥3,500 (\$21–\$29). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5pm–midnight. Kotoden streetcar: Kawaramachi Station (1 min.). Take the west exit (with the BUS STOP signs) and look for the small street running parallel to the north (right) of the covered shopping arcade. Maruichi is on the left and is easy to spot with its huge red lantern and circle (*maru*) with a horizontal line (*ichi*) through it.

Milano No Okazuyasan ★ NORTHERN ITALIAN Beneath an Italian flag is the recessed entrance to this second-floor restaurant. Hospitable chef-owner Mr. Takeda, who speaks some English and has an English-language menu, serves mainly homemade pastas, from the usual spaghetti Bolognese with meat sauce to spaghetti with squid in black sauce, as well as a handful of pizzas and main dishes that might include sautéed veal with lemon sauce. Set lunches include all the salad and fresh-baked bread you can eat, plus a choice of soup, dessert, or coffee. Whatever you order, don't miss the homemade bread, and be sure to top it all off with a cappuccino and dessert.

Egou Bldg., 11–14 Kamei-cho. ☎ 087/837-1782. Main dishes ¥600–¥1,300 (\$5–\$11); pasta ¥800–¥1,230 (\$6.65–\$10); set lunch ¥800 (\$6.65). MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Kotoden streetcar: Kawaramachi (4 min.). Take the west exit (with the BUS STOP sign) and walk through the covered walking arcade (Tokiwa-cho) until the awning ends; then start looking carefully for Milano on your left, opposite a bookstore.

①98 **Shabutei Maru** *Value* ★ SHABU-SHABU This casual, small, second-floor eatery has inexpensive lunches of chicken, pork, and beef, with second helpings

of rice and vegetables included in the price. From 5pm, it offers all-you-can-eat shabu-shabu (and in winter, sukiyaki) with a 90-minute time limit—kind of like an “on-your-mark, get-set, go” spree of uninhibited gorging. Ditto with all you can drink if you pay ¥1,300 (\$11) more. Seating is at counters or tables and, as you might have guessed, the place is usually very crowded.

8–8 Kamei-cho. ☎ 087/835-9842. Set lunch ¥470–¥1,080 (\$3.90–\$9); all-you-can-eat shabu-shabu ¥2,200 (\$18) men, ¥2,000 (\$17) women. MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm and 5pm–midnight. Kotoden streetcar: Kawaramachi (5 min.). Catty-corner from the southeast corner of Chuo Park, just off Chuo Dori on Kikuchikan-dori, next to the Japanese Tourist Board office.

Zaigoudon-Waraya SANUKI UDON NOODLES Zaigoudon-Waraya, in a 100-year-old thatched-roof house, is another noodle restaurant you might want to try, especially if you're going to Shikoku Mura Village. The Japanese menu, written on the wall, features handmade noodles, and the combination udon and tempura dish is especially popular, as is the zaru udon (served cold) in summer.

91 Yashima-Nakamachi. ☎ 087/843-3115. Sanuki udon ¥410–¥900 (\$3.40–\$7.50). No credit cards. Daily 10am–6:30pm. Kotoden streetcar: Kotoden Yashima Station (10 min.). Just below Shikoku Mura Village, near the entrance (look for the water wheel).

2 Matsuyama Castle & Dogo Spa ★★

947km (588 miles) W of Tokyo; 192km (120 miles) E of Takamatsu; 211km (132 miles) SW of Okayama

Although Matsuyama is Shikoku's largest town and the capital of Ehime Prefecture with a population of more than 470,000, it has the relaxed atmosphere of a small town. Located on the island's northwest coast, Matsuyama features one of Japan's best-preserved feudal castles and what I consider to be the most delightful, historic public bathhouse in the country, located in Dogo Onsen. The nearby Shimanami Kaido, a series of bridges connecting Ehime and Hiroshima prefectures, has a dedicated cycling lane, with fantastic views of the Seto Inland Sea.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane Flights connect Matsuyama with Tokyo, Osaka, Nagoya, Fukuoka, Sapporo, Miyazaki, and Kagoshima. The flight from Tokyo takes 1 hour and 25 minutes and costs ¥24,300 (\$203). Buses connect the airport to downtown in 30 minutes for ¥400 (\$3.35).

By Train The easiest way to reach Matsuyama is by **JR train** from Okayama (on Honshu island), with 15 departures daily; the trip takes 2 hours and 36 minutes, and the fare is ¥6,120 (\$51). There are also hourly departures from Takamatsu, taking less than 2½ hours and costing ¥5,500 (\$46).

By Bus Buses depart nightly from Tokyo Station at 8:20pm, arriving at Matsuyama Station the next day at 8:32am. The fare is ¥12,000 (\$100) one-way.

By Boat Matsuyama is also linked by ferry to various ports on Honshu and Kyushu islands, including Kobe (overnight trip time: 8 hr.), Osaka (overnight: 11 hr.), Beppu (3½ hr.), and Hiroshima (1 hr. by hydrofoil). The fare to Matsuyama is ¥5,200 (\$43) from Osaka, ¥2,600 (\$22) from Beppu, and ¥5,800 (\$48) from Hiroshima. Boats dock at **Matsuyama Port (Matsuyama Kanko Ko)**, where buses transport passengers to Matsuyama Station in about 30 minutes.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Matsuyama City Tourist Information Office** (☎ 089/931-3914; open daily 8:30am–5pm and sometimes closed noon–1pm) is inside JR Matsuyama Station to the left as you leave the wicket. In

addition, the Ehime Prefectural International Center, or **EPIC**, located between Matsuyama Castle and Dogo Onsen (☎ **089/917-5678**; open Mon–Fri 9am–5pm), provides information on Ehime Prefecture, including Uchiko, Tobe, and the Shimanami Kaido cycling path, as well as a TV with CNN, English-language newspapers, and three computers you can use for free. Be sure to pick up the useful *What's Going On*, an excellent, free, English-language guide to Matsuyama's events and points of interest; also get your free Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card, which provides discounts to sights, hotels, and restaurants in Ehime, Hiroshima, and Yamaguchi prefectures. To reach the tourist office, take streetcar no. 3, 5, or 6 heading toward Dogo Onsen to the Minami-machi stop. Backtrack and look to the right for the INFORMATION sign; the office is in a barrack partially hidden behind another building.

INTERNET ACCESS In addition to EPIC, above, you can also check e-mail at COMS on the second floor of the Matsuyama International Center, 6–4–20 Sanbancho (☎ **089/943-5777**; open Tues–Sat 9am–8:30pm and Sun and holidays to 5pm) for ¥100 (85¢) an hour. It's a 7-minute walk from Matsuyama Station; or take the streetcar to the Minami-horibata-cho stop.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND **JR Matsuyama Station**, which serves long-distance trains, is on the west edge of town, with most attractions, hotels, shopping, and restaurants spreading to the east. **Matsuyama Castle** lies less than 2.5km (1½ miles) due east of the station. Just southwest of the castle is the **Okaido** shopping arcade, a covered pedestrian passageway lined with restaurants and shops and considered to be the heart of the city. **Dogo Onsen**, Japan's oldest hot-spring spa, is on the eastern edge of the city.

The easiest and most convenient form of transportation in Matsuyama is **streetcar**. The no. 5 line runs from Matsuyama Station to the Okaido arcade (*note*: the Okaido stop is marked “Ichibancho” on some tourist maps), Matsuyama Castle, and Dogo Onsen. The fare is ¥150 (\$1.25) per trip or only ¥300 (\$2.50) for a **1-day pass (Ichinichi Joshaken)**. An old-fashioned locomotive-style streetcar operating between Matsuyama Station and Dogo Onsen charges ¥300 (\$2.50) per ride.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

The Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card gives discounts for both Matsuyama Castle and Dogo Onsen.

Matsuyama Castle ★★ Right in the heart of the city, Matsuyama Castle crowns the top of a 131m (435-ft.) hill, commanding an impressive view. It was built by feudal lord Kato Yoshiakira 400 years ago, later falling into the hands of the powerful Matsudaira family that ruled the surrounding region from here during the Edo Period. Like most structures in Japan, Matsuyama Castle has suffered fire and destruction through the ages, but unlike many other castles (such as those in Osaka and Nagoya), this one was renovated with original materials. There's only one entrance, a pathway leading through a series of gates that could be swung shut to trap attacking enemies. A secret gate allowed a surprise rear attack, while drop chutes could be used to rain stones onto the enemy. The three-story donjon houses some samurai gear, swords, screens, and scrolls from the Matsudaira family, as well as photographs of Japan's other castles. Allow yourself 30 minutes to tour the inside.

Surrounding the castle is a park; if you're feeling energetic, you can walk through the park to the castle in about 15 minutes. Otherwise, the easiest way

to reach the castle is to take the streetcar to the Okaido stop, walk 5 minutes along the street with the arch marked WELCOME TO MATSUYAMA CASTLE, and then take a cable car or chairlift (more fun) from the east side of Katsuyama Hill. A round-trip ticket (for the cable car or chairlift and admission to the castle) costs ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults and ¥400 (\$3.35) for children, including admission to the castle.

📞 089/921-4873. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) children. Daily 9am–5pm (to 4:30pm in Jan and 5:30pm in Aug.). Streetcar: Okaido stop, then chairlift.

DOGO ONSEN (DOGO SPA) ★★☆☆

Dogo Onsen boasts a 3,000-year history and claims to be the oldest hot-spring spa in Japan. According to legend, the hot springs were discovered after a white heron healed an injured leg by soaking it in the thermal mineral waters. Located in the northeast part of the city, about a 20-minute streetcar ride from Matsuyama Station (take streetcar no. 5 to Dogo Onsen, the last stop), Dogo Spa can accommodate about 10,000 people in 60 hotels and ryokan, which means the narrow streets resound at night with the slap of thonged slippers and the occasional clatter of *geta* as vacationers go to the various bathhouses dressed in *yukata* (cotton robes).

Most of the hotels and ryokan in Dogo have their own *onsen* (hot-spring bath), but I suggest that no matter where you stay, you make at least one trip to **Dogo Onsen Honkan** ★★☆☆, 5–6 Yunomachi, Dogo (📞 089/921-5141), a wonderful three-story public bathhouse built in 1894. A wooden structure with shoji screens, tatami rooms, creaking wooden stairways, and the legendary white heron topping the crest of its castle-like roof, this Momoyama-style building is as much a social institution as it is a place to soak and scrub. On busy days, as many as 4,000 people pass through its front doors. The water here is transparent, colorless, tasteless, and alkaline, helpful for rheumatism and neuralgia. At the very least, it makes your skin feel great—soft and smooth. The hottest spring water coming into the spa is 120°F (49°C); the coolest, 70°F (21°C). But don't worry—the waters are mixed to achieve a comfortable 108°F (42°C).

Bathing in the first-floor granite bath (rather ordinary-looking now but considered luxurious when it was built), however, is just a small part of the experience here. Most people come to relax, socialize, and while away an hour or more, and I suggest you do the same. Although you can bathe for as little as ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults and ¥120 (\$1) for children 2 to 11, it's worth it to pay extra for the privilege of relaxing on tatami mats in a communal room on the second floor, dressed in a rented *yukata* (cotton robe), drinking tea from a lacquered tea set, and eating Japanese rice crackers. If the weather is fine, all the shoji screens are pushed open to let in a breeze, and as you sprawl on the tatami, drinking your tea and listening to the clang of the streetcar and voices of people coming and going, you can imagine that you've landed in ancient Japan. To my mind, the whole scene resembles an old woodblock print suddenly come to life.

The cost of the bath, yukata, crackers, and tea for 1 hour is ¥620 (\$5.15) for adults, half price for children 2 to 11. Use of a smaller, more private bath and lounging area for an hour where tea and sweets are also served costs ¥980 (\$8.15) for adults and half price for children. And if you really want to splurge for 1 hour and 20 minutes, you can rent a private tatami room on the third floor, which also comes with tea, sweets, and yukata, for ¥1,240 (\$10) for adults, half price for children. This differentiation in luxury probably dates back to the early days when there were separate baths for the upper class, priests, commoners, and even animals.

While at the spa, be sure to see the **Yushinden**, the imperial rooms built for the imperial family in 1899 for their visits to the spa and last used in 1952. You can take a tour of its rooms for ¥210 (\$1.75) for adults and ¥100 (85¢) for children.

The spa is open from 6am (the arrival time of the 1st streetcar) until 11pm, but you must enter by 10:30pm. The second floor closes at 10pm (you must enter by 9pm) and the Yushinden at 9pm.

A NEARBY TEMPLE After your bath, you may want to visit **Ishiteji Temple** ♀, 2-9-21 Ishite (☎ 089/977-0870), about a 10-minute walk east of Dogo Onsen Station; from the station, walk under the neon archway and keep going straight east. Built in 1318, it's the 51st of Shikoku's 88 sacred temples; with its blend of Chinese and Japanese styles, it is a good example of architecture of the Kamakura Period. Notice the huge straw sandals at the main gate; those with feet or leg ailments are thought to regain their health by touching them. You'll also see regular-size sandals at the temple, donated by older Japanese in hopes of regaining new strength in their legs (who knows, maybe they've been walking the pilgrimage). The most interesting site, however, is the lit tunnel to the left behind the main temple. It contains stone statues representing the 88 temples of Shikoku; in front of each is sand from each temple location. If you pause in front of each statue, you'll make a short circuit to the actual pilgrimage, convenient for those who don't have time for the real thing. Admission to the tunnel is ¥100 (85¢), and the temple is open daily from 7:30am to 6pm.

AN EASY SIDE TRIP

UCHIKO ♀♂ If you have time for a side trip around Ehime Prefecture, I strongly recommend an excursion to the village of **Uchiko**, which has some fine old homes and buildings dating back to the Edo Period and the turn of the 20th century. Whereas about 70% of Matsuyama was destroyed during World War II, Uchiko was left intact, and a tiny part of the old historic district is a living memorial to the days of yore, when it prospered as a production center for wax. Even the 25-minute express train ride from JR Matsuyama Station (departing every hour or so) is enjoyable as you weave through valleys of wooded hills past grape, mikan orange, persimmon, rice, and tobacco farms. At Uchiko Station, ask for the "Uchiko Visitor's Guide" at the train station ticket window; it contains a map showing the 5-minute walk to Yokaichi, the historic part of town.

Your first stop is (199) **Uchikoza**, 1152-2 Kou, Uchiko-cho (☎ 0893/44-2840), a Kabuki theater built in 1916 (look for banners on the left after you pass the creek). Though not as grand as the one near Takamatsu (described on p. 477), it's a good example of how townspeople used to enjoy themselves years ago. It features a revolving stage, many windows that can be opened and closed to control the amount of light reaching the stage, and a small display of memorabilia (note the ultimate platform shoes, *geta*, used by Bunraku puppeteers). Uchikoza is open daily 9am to 5pm. Buy a combination ticket for ¥700 (\$5.85) for adults and ¥370 (\$3.10) for children; this allows admission to the theater, Museum of Commercial and Domestic Life, and Kami-Haga Residence listed below.

A 5-minute walk farther along the main street, on the right, is the **Museum of Commercial and Domestic Life (Akinai to Kurashi Hakubutsukan)**, 1082-1 Kou, Uchiko-cho (☎ 0893/44-5220). This museum, once housing a pharmacy and built in typical Uchiko style, uses life-size figures, recordings, and authentic artifacts in its dioramas depicting various professions and scenes from daily life, from shop owner to restaurant owner. One of the dioramas, for example, is of a Taisho-Era pharmacy, with two figures kneeling on a tatami floor as

they discuss the business at hand (in Japanese). Other places of interest in Yokaichi include two restored homes, **Machi-ya Shiryokan**, 1579–1 Kou, Uchiko-cho (☎ 0893/44-2111), open free to the public (as an empty house, it wouldn't be of much interest if it weren't free); and **Kami-Haga Residence**, 1519 Kou, Uchiko-cho (☎ 0893/44-2771; admission price included in the combination ticket described earlier). Built in 1894, the Kami-Haga Residence is especially grand, having once belonged to a merchant who made his fortune exporting wax. During the Edo and Meiji periods, Uchiko gained fame as a center of candlemaking and wax production, producing about 30% of the country's wax, used both for lighting and for the styling of elaborate Feudal-Era hairdos. You can see the traditional methods for wax production in the sheds out back, as well as tour the house. There's also an upstairs cafe, though you have to hunt for it and may have to rouse someone to serve you even if you do find it. All of these attractions are open daily from 9am to 4:30pm.

Today, only one person carries on this wax-making tradition—a man named (200) **Omori**, who represents the sixth generation of candlemakers. Following the same techniques as those developed by his ancestors 200 years ago, he collects his own haze berries (a kind of sumac) and makes his candles by hand. You can observe him at his workshop at 1587 Sakamachi-ko, Uchiko-cho (☎ 0893/43-0385; open Tues–Thurs, Sat, and Sun 9am–5pm).

Where to Dine: (201) **Shimohagatei**, 1090–1 Uchiko-ko (☎ 0893/44-6171; open Tues–Sun 10am–9pm), is housed in a 130-year-old former residence/shop on the main street of the historic district, near the Museum of Commercial and Domestic Life. With an inner garden courtyard typical of Uchiko architecture and an upstairs crafts gallery, it offers noodles, tempura, and set meals costing ¥1,200 and ¥1,500 (\$10 and \$13). No credit cards are accepted, but you can receive a 10% discount by showing your Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card.

CYCLING THE SHIMANAMI KAIDO ★★

If you're a bicyclist—and even if you're not—you owe it to yourself to ride one of Japan's most rewarding cycling routes: a dedicated biking and pedestrian lane that connects Ehime Prefecture on Shikoku with Onomichi in Hiroshima Prefecture on Honshu (Japan's main island). Part of the Shimanami Kaido route (also called the Setouchi Shimanami Seaway), which is actually a series of 10 bridges that hopscotch across the Seto Inland Sea via six islands, the cycling path runs beside vehicular traffic on the bridges but often diverges from the highway on the islands. Needless to say, views of the sea and surrounding countryside are great, and the pathway, clearly marked in green, is easy to follow (though steep in some areas). If you want, you can cycle the entire 70km (43-mile) distance between Shikoku and Honshu in less than 7 hours and then return by bus. Alternatively, you can cycle for a few hours and then head back; or you can go as far as you wish, leave your rental bike at one of 13 bike drop-off sites along the cycling path, and then catch a bus back.

For a fun day's outing, I suggest bicycling to Omishima, an island you'll reach in about 2 hours, where another 30 minutes of cycling will bring you to **Oyamazumi Shrine**. Worshipped through the years by samurai, the shrine is home to the **Shiyoden Treasure Museum** ★★ (☎ 0897-82-0032), with an astounding collection of helmets, armor, and swords, all donated to the shrine by warriors who wished to express thanks for victories in battle. About 80% of Japanese samurai gear designated National Treasures (look for the red mark) or National Important Cultural Assets are housed here, including items once worn by Minamoto Yoshitsune and Minamoto Yoritomo, in a building that is surprisingly

dilapidated. The museum is open daily 8:30am to 5pm; admission is ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults, ¥800 (\$6.65) for students, and ¥400 (\$3.35) for children. By the way, there's a bike drop-off center just before the shrine, where you can leave your bike, shower, and catch a bus back.

Rental bikes are available at the foot of the first bridge at **Sunrise Itoyama** (☎ 0898-41-3196), which also offers simple hotel facilities and a restaurant. Bikes rent for ¥500 (\$4.15) a day. There are also power-assisted bikes for ¥800 (\$6.65); I rented one (in the interest of research, of course) and found it helpful on the circular ramp that climbs 65m (213 ft.) just to meet the first bridge. There's also a ¥1,000 (\$8.35) deposit, which you forfeit if you decide to ditch your bike at one of the drop-off sites; be sure to ask the folks at Sunrise Itoyama for a bus schedule back. You'll also have the annoyance of bridge toll fees at varying distances (¥300/\$2.50 total for the trip to Omishima). The bicycling center is open daily 8am to 8pm (to 5pm Oct–Mar).

To reach Sunrise Itoyama, take an express train from Matsuyama Station 30 minutes to Imabari, from where there are three to five buses a day to the Sunrise Itoyama cycling center. You'll probably find it easier, therefore, to take a local train 5 minutes onward from Imabari to Hashihama, from which the cycling center is a 20-minute walk.

SHOPPING

TOBE Ehime Prefecture is famous for its Tobe pottery, called *Tobe-yaki* in Japanese. About 100 families in the town of Tobe are still engaged in the craft. An excellent way to see this pottery, noted for its thick white porcelain painted with cobalt-blue designs, is to visit (202) **Tobe Pottery Traditional Industry Hall (Tobeyaki Dento Sangyo Kaikan)** at 335 Ohminami, Tobe-cho (☎ 089/962-6600; open Fri–Wed 9am–5pm). In addition to displays of Tobe ware from the Edo Period to the present and a video showing the creative process, it also sells contemporary ware from local producers, making it a good place to shop for a variety of styles. Admission is ¥200 (\$1.65) for adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) for high-school and university students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children (the Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card provides a modest discount). To get there, take a bus bound for Danso-guchi, Toyama, or Oiwabashi from platform no. 3 at Matsuyama Shi-eki; it takes 45 minutes to reach the Dento Sangyo Kaikan-mae stop (fare: ¥600/\$5), from which it's a 2-minute walk (continue straight on and take the 1st right; it's at the T-intersection). A 30-minute taxi ride costs about ¥3,500 (\$29). There are also several kilns open to the public; the largest and best known of these is (203) **Umeno-Seito-Sho** at 1441 Ohminami, Tobe-cho (☎ 089/962-2311; open Tues–Sun 8am–4:50pm, closed 2nd and 3rd Sun of each month and a few days in mid-Aug). Founded back in 1882 and now in its fifth generation of ownership by the Umeno family, it employs more than 100 people. You can watch all the artisans except those who do the glazing—the technique is a closely guarded secret. Inside the shop, be sure to check out the bargain corner where pieces with slight imperfections go for about half price. Get a map from the Tobe Pottery Traditional Industry Hall that shows the 20-minute walk to Umeno-Seito-Sho.

WHERE TO STAY

For more suggestions of where to stay in the Dogo Onsen area, or to make a reservation in a ryokan there, contact the **Dogo Onsen Ryokan-Kumiai** (☎ 089/943-8342; fax 089/943-8343), located near the Dogo Onsen streetcar

stop at the entrance to the shopping arcade (on the right). It's open daily 8am to 8pm.

Your Seto Inland Sea Welcome Card provides a 10% to 20% discount on some of the accommodations below, including Yamatoya Besso, ANA Hotel Matsuyama, and Hotel Patio Dogo. Mention the card when making your reservation and be sure to show it upon check-in.

VERY EXPENSIVE

(204) Yamatoya Besso ★★☆☆ The ultimate ryokan experience awaits you at this famous ryokan in Dogo Onsen. It's the little things that make it special—the rustle of kimono as you're met by bowing, smiling women in the front courtyard; pillars of salt at the front door in good Shinto fashion; lit shoji lanterns guiding the way through hushed hallways; scrolls of haiku poems, in beautiful calligraphy, decorating all the rooms and changed seven times a year to fit the season. With a history dating back 120 years—it was rebuilt in 1988 as a refined, luxurious inn—it offers rooms that preserve the integrity of the past with TVs hidden behind shoji screens and old-fashioned cypress tubs that use water from the hot springs. Lavish kaiseki meals feature seafood of the Seto Inland Sea. The only thing lacking at this superb ryokan is the requisite garden.

2–27 Dogo Sagidani-cho, Matsuyama 790-0836. ☎ 089/931-7771. Fax 089/931-7775. 19 units. ¥48,000–¥80,500 (\$400–\$671) per person. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: Dogo Onsen (5 min.). **Amenities:** Public indoor and outdoor hot-spring baths; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

EXPENSIVE

ANA Hotel ★ Matsuyama's premier hotel (called Zenniku Hotel in Japanese) has a great location in the heart of the city, just a few minutes' walk to the Matsuyama Castle ropeway and the Okaido covered shopping arcade; streetcars heading for Dogo Onsen pass right in front of the hotel. Built in 1979 but constantly updated, it offers business hotel-like inexpensive singles, as well as larger and well-appointed singles, twins, and doubles; ask for a double or a twin with a castle view.

3–2–1 Ichiban-cho, Matsuyama 790-8520. ☎ 800/262-4683 in the U.S. and Canada or 089/933-5511. Fax 089/921-6053. www.anahotels.com/myj. 327 units. ¥7,500–¥10,500 (\$63–\$88) single; ¥17,000–¥32,000 (\$142–\$267) double; ¥17,500–¥25,000 (\$146–\$208) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: Okaido (1 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, Western, coffee shop); bar; tea lounge; rooftop beer garden (summer only); large shopping arcade (including one shop selling *Tobe-yaki* pottery, described under shopping, above); room service (6:30am–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press.

(205) Umenoya ★★☆☆ Small, intimate, and secluded from the world behind a wall, this wonderful, 50-something-year-old inn boasts a beautiful small garden, beyond which are a canal, a park, and a wooded hill in the distance (a good example of borrowed landscape). Rooms, which are graced with such architectural details as bamboo weavings and wood-carved transoms, vary in price according to amenities and view; the best have cypress tubs, toilets with heated seats, and views of the garden. One of the public baths is in a hut with a conical-shaped roof in the garden.

2–8–9 Kami-ichi, Matsuyama 790-0853. ☎ 089/941-2570. Fax 089/941-1025. umenoya@dogo.or.jp. 10 units (2 with bathrooms, 8 with toilets only). ¥20,000 (\$167) per person in room with toilet only; ¥30,000 (\$250) per person in room with bathroom. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: Dogo Onsen (5 min.). **Amenities:** Public indoor and hot-spring baths; in-room massage; same-day laundry service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

MODERATE

Hotel Patio Dogo ★ With a great location just across the street from the delightful Dogo Onsen Honkan spa, this smart-looking medium-class hotel offers semi-double beds in singles, and queens in the more expensive double rooms. Ah, space at last! Some rooms (on the 8th and 9th floors) have a view of Matsuyama Castle far in the distance (binoculars would come in handy), but best are rooms on the second through fourth floors whose windows overlook the historic spa. The most expensive accommodations in each category are larger, corner rooms. In the evening, be sure to join all the other tourists staying in Dogo and wear your yukata across the street for a nighttime soak in the historic spa.

20–12 Yuno-machi, Dogo, Matsuyama 790-0842. ☎ 089/941-4128. Fax 089/941-4129. www.patio-dogo.co.jp. 101 units. ¥7,200–¥9,000 (\$60–\$75) single; ¥12,000–¥13,000 (\$100–\$108) double; ¥15,000–¥22,000 (\$125–\$133) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: Dogo Onsen (5 min.). Walk though the covered shopping arcade and turn left. **Amenities:** Restaurant (a branch of Sushimaru; see “Where to Dine,” below); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

International Hotel Matsuyama (Kokusai Hotel) Opened in 1981 and not as spiffy as it once was, this medium-priced hotel is comfortable enough and, centrally located near the Okaido shopping arcade and Matsuyama Castle ropeway, is a good base for exploring the city. It caters almost exclusively to Japanese, with single rooms boasting double-size beds, good-size desks and, wonder of wonders, fax machines (equipped only to send faxes; you’ll have to receive faxes through the front desk). A few singles also have dataports. Some of the twins have castle views, and there are also “corner” doubles and twins that are spacious with lots of windows that open and let in lots of light. Women qualify for a 20% discount on single and twin rooms. The rest of you will have to content yourselves with a special 10% discount offered to Frommer’s readers; show this book upon checking in.

1–13 Ichiban-cho, Matsuyama 790-0001. ☎ 089/932-5111. Fax 089/945-2055. k-hotelm@cello.ocn.ne.jp. 80 units. ¥6,800 (\$57) single; ¥8,000–¥20,000 (\$67–\$167) twin; ¥10,500–¥20,000 (\$88–\$167) double. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: Okaido—marked “Ichibancho” on some tourist maps (3 min.). Continue east on Den-sha Dori to the 1st gas station and turn left; the hotel is on your right. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Western, Chinese); room service (11:30am–9:30pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, fax (in singles and some twins), dataports (in some), minibar (twin rooms only), fridge (singles and doubles only), hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

②06 **Business Hotel Taihei** *Kids* This business hotel has a rather inconvenient location, at the base of the Matsuyama Castle hill but on the opposite side of the city’s downtown; you have to transfer between streetcars to reach Dogo Onsen. Still, it offers very good value and—unusual for business hotels—offers features good for families, including a small play area in the exercise room so that Mom and Dad can get a workout on the treadmill and stationary bike while the kids ride the pedal car or play video games. In addition to both Western- and Japanese-style rooms, there are also four combination rooms with tatami areas and Western-style beds that sleep up to four persons, as well as two large family rooms that sleep five. Windows can be opened. The public baths and rooms facing the back look out on the mountain greenery and are quieter. Although there’s an inexpensive dining room, I recommend that you eat elsewhere.

3–3–15 Heiwa Dori, Matsuyama 790-0807. ☎ 089/943-3560. Fax 089/932-2525. 144 units. ¥4,800 (\$40) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) double; ¥8,000–¥10,000 (\$67–\$83) twin; ¥12,000 (\$100) Japanese-style room for 2, ¥15,000 (\$125) for 3; family room ¥25,000 (\$208) for 5. No credit cards. Streetcar: Teppo-cho (3 min.). Going in the same direction as the streetcar, take the 1st right and then turn right again onto Heiwadori; you’ll see the hotel on your left. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); exercise room with children’s play area; public bath; sauna; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

②07 **Minshuku Miyoshi** This simple establishment is located in Dogo Onsen near Ishiteji Temple; if you call ahead, someone can pick you up at the Dogo Onsen streetcar stop. Although not much English is spoken, they're used to foreigners here. Clean but simple tatami rooms, all with sink and toilet, make it a good choice for young budget travelers.

3–7–23 Ishite, Matsuyama 790-0852. ☎ 089/977-2581. Fax 089/977-2581. 6 units (none with bathroom, all with toilet). ¥4,000 (\$33) per person without meals; ¥7,000 (\$58) per person including 2 meals. No credit cards. Streetcar: Dogo Onsen (10 min.). Bus: no. 52 to Ishiteji. Across from Ishiteji Temple, set back from the road behind Cosmo gas station and parking lot. **Amenities:** Washer/dryer (free of charge). *In room:* A/C, TV, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE EXPENSIVE

Kadota ★ FRENCH Chef Kadota worked 9 years at the venerable Okura Hotel and then at the ANA Hotel in Matsuyama before opening his own restaurant here in 1993. Small and cozy, with classical music playing in the background, flowers on every table, and French cuisine served on elegant tableware, it offers homemade appetizers, organic vegetables whenever possible, and—the house specialty—steaks and seafood. It offers only fixed-price meals; your dinner may start with a cold cucumber soup, followed by *ayu* (a Japanese river fish) served in a green sauce of puréed spinach and white wine, or steak served in a sauce of red wine and veal with sweet potato gratin.

3–4–25 Sanban-cho. ☎ 089/931-3511. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥5,000–¥15,000 (\$42–\$125); set lunch ¥2,000–¥3,000 (\$17–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–9pm (last order). Closed 2 days in Aug. Streetcar: Kencho-mae (5 min.). Take the side road to the left of the ANA hotel and continue straight, keeping a lookout for a side street with Christmas lights and a small sign (it's easy to miss).

MODERATE

②08 **Kushihide** YAKITORI/GRILLED FOODS Behind the counter of this 40-year-old-eatery are some 400 individual sake cups inscribed with the names of regular customers—the cook joked that this way, the cups didn't have to be washed. Washed or unwashed, they're testimony to the popularity of this simple eating and drinking venue. As soon as you sit down, a large bowl of cabbage with a dip and an appetizer will be placed in front of you. The restaurant is most famous for its boiled chicken leg and thigh for ¥800 (\$6.65), included in some of the set meals. It also offers chicken sashimi; the restaurant claims to be one of the few places you can eat it safely, as the restaurant raises its own chickens and serves them the day of their demise. Nearby is the chain's sushi restaurant, 3–2–4 Nibancho (☎ 089/921-9410).

3–2–8 Nibancho. ☎ 089/921-1587. Sticks ¥150–¥200 (\$1.25–\$1.65); set meal ¥1,500–¥4,000 (\$13–\$33). AE, MC, V. Daily 5–11pm. Streetcar: Okaido—marked "Ichibancho" on some tourist maps (2 min.). Walk down Okaido Arcade and take the 1st right after the stoplights; it's 1 block farther on your left.

②09 **Sushimaru** SUSHI Located just east of the Okaido shopping arcade, Sushimaru has Japanese *noren* (shop curtains), a display case outside, and old-fashioned architecture. The popular *higawari* (today's lunch), served Monday through Saturday until 2pm and displayed outside the front door, consists of sushi, *nigiri* sushi (sushi rolls), salad, and soup for ¥690 (\$5.75). A Japanese menu with photos shows other set meals. In the evening, *kaiseki* featuring sashimi are also available.

Another Sushimaru with the same menu is located across the street from Dogo Onsen in the Hotel Patio Dogo at 20–12 Yunomachi (☎ 089/932-6157; open daily 11am–2pm and 5–10pm).

2-3-2 Nibancho. ☎ 089/941-0447. Set meal ¥1,000–¥3,500 (\$8.35–\$29); kaiseki ¥3,500–¥10,000 (\$29–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–9pm. Streetcar: Okaido—"Ichibancho" on some tourist maps (2 min.). Walk south along the Okaido shopping arcade. After you cross Nichiban-cho (the 1st light), take the 1st small street on your left; it will be on your right a few shops down.

②10 **Tokuhiro** SHABU SHABU/YAKINIKU Located near the castle ropeway, this modern restaurant has tables with views of a waterfall and a pond in which koi swim happily about, as well as quiet tatami rooms. It offers all-you-can-eat yakiniku and shabu-shabu with a 90-minute time limit. Prices, depending on the meat's quality, are ¥2,900 or ¥3,900 (\$24 or \$33) for men and ¥500 (\$4.15) less for women. The cheapest lunch, costing ¥680 (\$5.65), is served until 2pm, but others are available until 4pm.

3-7-10 Okaido. ☎ 089/934-0880. Set lunch ¥680–¥2,000 (\$5.65–\$17); set dinner ¥1,600–¥5,500 (\$13–\$46). MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5–11pm (last order 10pm). Streetcar: Okaido—"Ichibancho" on some maps (5 min.). Walk up the street with the WELCOME TO MATSUYAMA CASTLE arch; the restaurant will be on your right.

INEXPENSIVE

Dogo Beer *(Finds)* If you agree that "One gulp of beer taken just after a bath is the time when you feel most refreshed," as proclaimed in this microbrewery's pamphlet, then after bathing at Dogo Onsen Honkan, head straight across the street for some sake or beer (the parent company has been a sake producer for more than a century; it opened a brewery in 1996 following deregulation that had long assured a beer monopoly by the major players). An upbeat establishment with an eclectic decor mixing the traditional (bamboo ceilings) and the modern (artwork), and with jazz the background music of choice, it offers German-style beers, a stout, and sake. Although a sign outside its doors reads BREWERY RESTAURANT, its Japanese menu with pictures is limited to yakitori (¥380/\$3.15 for three sticks), fried chicken (*senzanki*), deep-fried fish paste (*gyakoten*), and other pub foods, with most dishes priced below ¥700 (\$5.85). Your best bet is to order one of the set meals.

3-23 Dogo Kitamachi. ☎ 089/924-6617. Set lunch ¥1,000–¥2,500 (\$8.35–\$21); set dinner ¥1,500–¥5,000 (\$13–\$42). No credit cards. Daily 11am–9:30pm. Streetcar: Dogo Onsen. Walk through the covered shopping arcade and then turn left.

Kyushu

The southernmost of Japan's four main islands, Kyushu offers a mild climate, famous hot-spring spas, beautiful countryside, national parks, and warm, friendly people. It also boasts a couple of high-tech theme parks that make it Japan's number one destination for visitors from Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Asian cities.

Historians believe that Japan's earliest inhabitants lived on Kyushu before

gradually pushing northward. According to Japanese legend, it was from Kyushu that the first emperor, Jimmu, began his campaign to unify Japan. Kyushu is therefore considered to be the cradle of Japanese civilization. And because Kyushu is the island closest to Korea and China, it has served through the centuries as a point of influx for both people and ideas from abroad, including those from the West.

THE CIRCLE ISLAND TOUR: A SUGGESTED ITINERARY FOR SEEING KYUSHU

Most of Kyushu's towns are along the coast, which means you can visit most of the island's cities and attractions by circling the island by train. You might, for example, wish to start out in Fukuoka, where Hakata Station is the terminus for Shinkansen bullet trains from Tokyo. From there you can head south to Kagoshima, stopping along the east coast of the island at Beppu and Miyazaki along the way. From Kagoshima, consider taking the bus to Chiran to visit its famous samurai gardens and continuing onward to the hot-springs area of Ibusuki, near Kyushu's southernmost tip. Traveling northward from Kagoshima along Kyushu's western coast brings you to Kumamoto and the exciting city of Nagasaki, where you can finish your tour of Kyushu by taking a bus to the mountain resort spa of Unzen. Complete your circuit of the island by returning to Fukuoka and boarding a Shinkansen bullet train bound for Honshu.

1 Fukuoka

1,174km (730 miles) W of Tokyo; 450km (281 miles) W of Hiroshima

With a population of 1.3 million, **Fukuoka** is Kyushu's largest city and serves as a major international and domestic gateway to the island. On the northern coast of Kyushu, it lies closer to Seoul, Korea, than to Tokyo.

During Japan's feudal days, Fukuoka was divided into two distinct towns separated by the Nakagawa River. Fukuoka was where the samurai lived since it was the castle town of the local feudal lord. Merchants lived across the river in Hakata, the commercial center of the area. Both cities were joined in 1889 under the common name of Fukuoka. Fukuoka's main train station, however, is in Hakata and is therefore called Hakata Station. Hakata Station serves as the terminus of the Tokaido-Sanyo Shinkansen Line from Tokyo.

In the 13th century, Fukuoka was selected by Mongol forces under Kublai Khan as the best place to invade Japan. The first attack came in 1274, but the Japanese were able to repel the invasion. Convinced the Mongols would attack

again, the Japanese built a 3m (10-ft.) high stone wall along the coast. The second invasion came in 1281. Not only did the Mongols find the wall impossible to scale, but a typhoon blew in and destroyed the entire Mongol fleet. The Japanese called this gift from heaven “divine wind,” or *kamikaze*, a word that took on a different meaning during World War II when young Japanese pilots crashed their planes into American ships in a last-ditch attempt to win the war.

Today, Fukuoka is a modern, internationally oriented commercial and business center with a highly developed port and coastal area. Although it's not a must-see tourist destination, there are some interesting museums, shrines, and a temple worth seeing if you've arrived in Fukuoka on the Shinkansen.

ESSENTIALS

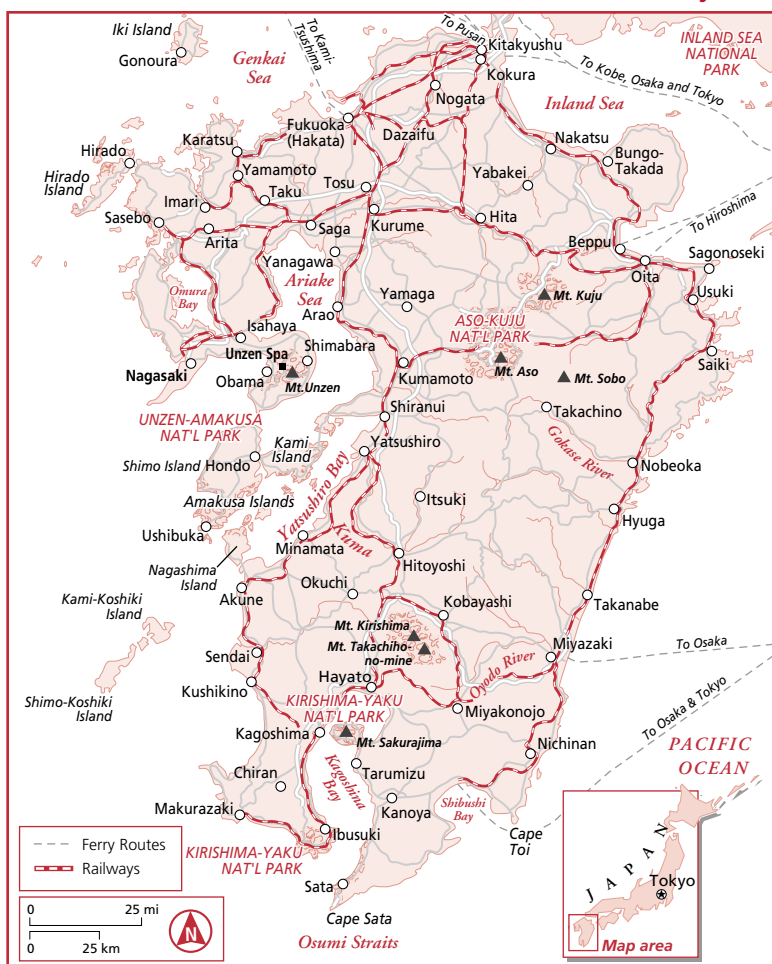
GETTING THERE By Plane Direct flights connect Fukuoka to a variety of international cities, including Honolulu and Hong Kong, as well as numerous domestic cities. Flying time from Tokyo's Haneda Airport is 1½ hours; the regular, one-way fare costs ¥31,000 (\$258) on ANA and Japan Airlines. However, because of fierce competition on the Fukuoka–Haneda route, bargains do exist. **Skymark** (☎ 03/3433-7670 in Tokyo; 092/736-3131 in Fukuoka), for example, a small airline serving Fukuoka, offers six flights daily from Haneda to Fukuoka for as low as ¥14,300 (\$120) one-way, while even major airlines sometimes offer special rates of ¥16,500 (\$138), depending on the time of day and season. To get into town, there's a subway station located directly under the domestic terminal of **Fukuoka Airport** (if you've arrived at the international terminal, take the free shuttle bus to the domestic terminal). The trip to Hakata Station takes only 5 minutes and to Tenjin takes 11; the fare is ¥250 (\$2.10), or you can purchase a 1-day subway pass for ¥600 (\$5) if you plan to sightsee the same day. Alternatively, there's Nishitetsu bus service directly from the international terminal to Hakata Station's bus terminal; departures are every 20 to 30 minutes and cost ¥190 (\$1.60).

By Train Fukuoka's **Hakata Station** is the last stop on the Shinkansen bullet train from Tokyo, almost 6½ hours away; Hiroshima is 1½ hours away. The fare from Tokyo is ¥21,210 (\$177) for an unreserved seat.

By Bus Buses depart from Tokyo's Shinjuku Station nightly at 9pm, arriving at Hakata Station the next morning at 11:10am. The fare is ¥15,000 (\$125) one-way.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before leaving Tokyo, Kyoto, or the Narita or Kansai airports, pick up a copy of the leaflet “Fukuoka” at the Tourist Information Center.

The **Fukuoka Tourist Information Office** (☎ 092/431-3003; open daily 9am–7pm) is in Hakata Station near the Hakata (west) exit. It has maps and a pamphlet in English, and English speakers are almost always on hand. Go there to pick up free copies of *Rainbow*, a monthly with concert, exhibition, events, and festival information; and *Fukuoka Now*, good for restaurant and nightlife listings. Also ask for the free *Fukuoka on Foot*, an excellent booklet of walking tours, as well as the free **Welcome Card** and accompanying guide, which gives overseas visitors discounts for selected hotels, restaurants, attractions, and shops (the card must be presented at check-in to receive hotel discount). Beside the tourist office is a counter for hotel reservations, with a ¥525 (\$4.35) charge for the service. For information on Fukuoka Prefecture, including Space World in Kitakyushu, go to the **Fukuoka Prefecture Tourist Information Center** on the second floor of the ACROS Building, 1–1–1 Tenjin, Chuo-ku (☎ 092/725-9100; open daily



10am–7pm, closed 2nd and 4th Mon of each month); English-speaking volunteers are available daily from noon to 6pm. Apply here, too, for the free services of an English-speaking **Volunteer Goodwill Guide**, who can guide you to Fukuoka's many sights.

On the Internet, check out the Fukuoka Convention and Visitors Bureau website at www.welcome-fukuoka.or.jp. Other useful sites include www.fukuoka-now.com (good for restaurants and nightlife), www.acros.or.jp/english/english.html (with information on Fukuoka City and Fukuoka Prefecture), and <http://kyushu.com/fukuoka> (an online city guide).

INTERNET ACCESS You can check e-mail 24 hours a day at **Kinko's**, 1–4–1 Hakata-Eki-mae (☎ 092/473-2677), on the right side of Taihaku-dori about a 6-minute walk from Hakata Station's west side. You'll find other Kinko's on the east side of Hakata Station at 2–5–28 Hakata Eki Higashi (☎ 092/414-3399) and in Tenjin-Minami near Mitsukoshi department store at

1–22–17 Imaizumi (☎ 092/722-4222). Kinko's charges ¥200 (\$1.65) per 10 minutes of use.

MAIL & ATMS An international post office, with a counter for stamps and mail that is open 24 hours as well as an ATM that accepts international credit cards, is located next to the Hakata (west) exit of Hakata Station.

ORIENTATION Although Hakata Station is the terminus for the Shinkansen bullet train and trains departing for the rest of Kyushu, with most of Fukuoka's hotels clustered nearby, the heart and business center of Fukuoka is an area to the west called **Tenjin**. It's home to several department stores, its own train station and bus center, a large underground shopping arcade, and restaurants. Just a few minutes' walk from Tenjin is **Nakasu**, one of Japan's most famous nightlife districts, with more than 2,000 bars, restaurants, and small clubs clustered on what's actually an islet bounded by the Nakagawa River.

Across the river from Nakasu (and a 10-min. walk west of Hakata Station) is **Canal City Hakata**, an intriguingly designed (by award-winning American architect Jon Jerde) entertainment, hotel, and shopping complex with 125 shops and restaurants. Also nearby and within walking distance are Tochoji Temple, Hakata Machiya Folk Museum, Kushida Shrine, and the Fukuoka Asian Art Museum.

GETTING AROUND You can **walk** from Hakata Station to most of the attractions recommended below.

By Subway This is the easiest method of transportation because there are only two lines. One line runs from Hakata Station to Tenjin (the 3rd stop), passing Nakasu-Kawabata on the way, the stop for the Nakasu nightlife district. This same line will also take you to Fukuoka Airport. Stops are announced in English. Fares start at ¥200 (\$1.65), but if you think you'll be riding a lot, purchase a one-day subway pass for ¥600 (\$5).

By Train Whereas Hakata Station serves as the terminus for the Shinkansen and Japan Railways trains departing for the rest of Kyushu, Tenjin has its own station, called **Nishitetsu Fukuoka Station**, located inside the Mitsukoshi department store building and useful for trips to Dazaifu.

By Bus The city's two bus terminals are located near Hakata Station at the Kotsu Center and in Tenjin near Nishitetsu Fukuoka Station and Mitsukoshi department store; both are clearly marked in English. Buses running inside the central Hakata-Tenjin District charge a flat fare of ¥100 (85¢). Most useful for tourists is the so-called "¥100 (85¢) Bus," which sports a big, ¥100 coin on its side and travels a circular route to Tenjin, Canal City, Hakata Station, and the Hakata Riverain shopping/cultural complex.

EXPLORING THE CITY

About an 8-minute walk northwest of Hakata Station and located on the right side of Taihaku-dori is **Tochoji Temple**, 2–4 Gokushomachi (☎ 092/291-4459; daily 9am–5pm; subway: one stop from Hakata Station to Gion, exit 1, 1 min.). This modern reconstruction of a long-established temple may not look like much, but up on the second floor is Japan's largest seated wooden Buddha, measuring 9.9m (33 ft.) tall. Admission is free, but refrain from taking photographs. Particularly interesting is the trip through the Hells of Buddhism, upon which you can embark by entering the small room underneath the Buddha. After viewing colored reliefs of unfortunate souls burning in hell, being boiled alive, and suffering other tortures, enter the darkened passageway and walk

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide with an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in appendix C showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, the **Hakata Machiya Folk Museum** (below), refer to no. 211 in appendix C.

through it guided by a rail, whereupon you'll reach the end—enlightenment! It's fun for older kids.

On the other side of Taihaku-dori Avenue, down the side street marked by a large cement torii, is the **(211) Hakata Machiya Folk Museum (Hakata Machiya Furusato-Kan)** , 6–10 Reisen-machi (📞 092/281-7761; daily 10am–6pm; subway: Gion, exit 2, 4 min.). This museum celebrates the history and cultural heritage of Hakata, the old merchants' town, concentrating primarily on the Meiji and Taisho eras. It occupies three buildings, two of which are Meiji-Era replicas; the third is an authentic, 150-year-old house of a weaver. On display are items used in everyday life, including lunch boxes and combs, as well as dioramas depicting festivals, everyday street scenes, and a home typical of a Hakata merchant family. On a telephone, you can listen to Hakata-ben, the local dialect, which is quite difficult even for native Japanese speakers to understand. You can also watch artisans at work on Hakata's most famous wares, including the highly refined Hakata dolls, tops, wooden containers, and Hakata-ori cloth, used for *obi* sashes and famous for loincloths worn by sumo wrestlers. Be sure to see the 22-minute film of the Yamakasa Festival, Fukuoka's most famous festival, featuring races of men carrying enormous floats. Add another 30 minutes to see the museum itself. Admission is ¥200 (\$1.65) for adults and ¥100 (85¢) for children.

Beyond the Hakata Machiya Folk Museum is **Kushida Shrine**, 1 Kamikawabata-machi (📞 092/291-2951; shrine grounds open 24 hr.), Fukuoka's oldest shrine. Site of the Yamakasa Festival, it has long been the shrine for merchants praying for good health and prosperity. Most interesting is a tall, towering float on view year-round that is used in the Yamakasa Festival held in mid-July and decorated with dolls made by Hakata doll makers. Incredibly, the elaborate floats are made anew every year.

Walk through Kushida Shrine and turn right into the **Kawabata-dori covered shopping arcade**. Linking Canal City Hakata and Hakata Riverain, it was once the city's main shopping street but has been overtaken by the two complexes it connects. Halfway down is another float on view year-round that's used in the Yamakasa Festival. At the end of the arcade, across the street, is Riverain, where up on the seventh and eighth floors is the **Fukuoka Asian Art Museum** , 3–1 Shimo-Kawabatomachi (📞 092/263-1100; Thurs–Tues 10am–8pm), the only museum I've seen in Japan devoted to contemporary and modern art from around Asia. From folk pop art to political art, the permanent exhibition presents the cutting edge of art from the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, China, Mongolia, Korea, India, and other Asian countries, with changing displays culled from the museum's own collection. It's very much worth the hour you'll spend here and the ¥200 (\$1.65) admission for adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) for college and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for junior-high students. The closest subway station is Nakasu-Kawabata Station (exit 6) in front of Riverain.

If you're ready for dining or shopping, retrace your steps through Kawabata-dori arcade and take the escalator leading to the spectacular **Canal City Hakata**, a virtual city-within-a-city complete with hotels, shops, restaurants, the Sega Joypolis amusement arcade, and a 177m (590-ft.) long canal that runs through its center.

EASY SIDE TRIPS FROM FUKUOKA

DAZAIFU

If you have 3 or more hours to spare, I heartily recommend taking a side trip to **Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine** 天満宮, 4-7-1 Saifu Dazaifu (☎ 092/922-8225), which is immensely popular with the Japanese. It was established in 905 soon after the death of Sugawara Michizane, who was suddenly demoted from his position as Minister of the Right and sent here to work. He is now deified at the shrine as the god of scholarship, which explains why the shrine is so popular—high-school students flock here to pray that they pass the tough entrance exams into universities. Dazaifu has a festive atmosphere, and one of the main reasons to visit, in my opinion, is to see everyone else.

The best way to reach Dazaifu is from Nishitetsu Fukuoka Station in Tenjin (located in the Mitsukoshi department store building). Take a limited express (*tokyu*) of the Nishitetsu Omuta Line 12 minutes to Futsukaichi; transfer there (across the platform) for the 8-minute train ride on the Nishitetsu Daisafu Line (two stops) to Dazaifu Station, the last stop (though there are a few *kyuko* trains that go directly from Fukuoka Station to Dazaifu). If you don't catch a limited express, the trip to Dazaifu can take about 50 minutes. In any case, the fare is ¥390 (\$3.35) one-way. The **Dazaifu Tourist Office** (☎ 092/925-1880; daily

Take Me Out to the Ballgame

If you're in town March through September, consider seeing the **Fukuoka Daiei Hawks** baseball team play one of its 70-some home games in Fukuoka Dome, the first retractable-roof stadium in Japan. Tickets start at ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for an unreserved seat in the outfield and are available at any Lawson convenience store up to 2 hours before the start of the game or at the box office. Personally, I find watching the spectators as much fun as watching the game, with their coordinated cheering, flag waving, trumpet blowing, and more. Oddly enough, the roof is kept closed (in case it rains and so that players aren't distracted by their shadows) except for occasional night games and during the last 15 minutes of a game if it looks like the Hawks are going to win. And this being Japan, the dome is part of a larger **Hawks Town** complex with restaurants, other amusements, and even a Backstage Tour held daily at 9am and 4pm (except on game days when it's at 10am, or night games when it's at 9am and 2pm) that allows you to see the dome at close range for ¥1,000 (\$8.35). To reach Hawks Town, take the subway to the Tojinmachi stop, from which it's about a 15-minute walk. Or take bus no. 39 or 306 from gate 5 of the Kotsu Bus Center in front of Hakata Station to the Fukuoka-Dome Mae. On game days, there are also special shuttle buses departing from the bus centers in Tenjin and Kotsu Center near Hakata Station.

8:30am–5pm), located to the right inside Dazaifu Station, has an English pamphlet. Or, if you want to know more about the shrine, rent headphones with English commentary at the entrance to the shrine precinct for ¥300 (\$2.50) at an information counter open daily 9am to 5pm. In addition, several English-speaking guides are available to lead 30-minute tours for free, but you must reserve by e-mail (kenkyusyo@dazaifutenmangu.or.jp) in advance.

Dazaifu Tenmangu Shrine is a 5-minute walk from the station. Take a right onto a pedestrian lane lined with shops selling souvenirs, sweets, and crafts, followed by a series of arched bridges spanning turtle-filled ponds leading to the main hall, built in 1590. On the day I was there, 1-month-old babies were being blessed for good health (or maybe as insurance toward a good education?), one after the other. Behind the hall hang wooden tablets, written with the wishes of visitors—mostly for successful examination scores. Also behind the main hall is an extensive plum grove with 6,000 trees; the plum blossom, in bloom from late January to March, is considered the symbol of scholarship.

Whatever you do, don't miss **Komyozenji Temple** 興福寺, just a 2-minute walk away from the shrine. This Zen temple boasts Kyushu's sole rock garden, arranged to form the Chinese character for "light." In the back is also a combination moss-rock garden, representing the sea and land and shaded by maple trees. It's a glorious sight and is almost never crowded, except in autumn when changing maple leaves make it even more spectacular. To see it, take your shoes off, throw ¥200 (\$1.65) into the donation box, and walk to the wooden veranda in back where you can sit and meditate. It's open daily from 8am to 5pm.

SPACE WORLD

One of Kyushu's most popular high-tech theme parks is **Space World**, Yahata-Higashi-ku (☎ 093/672-3445), in the town of Kitakyushu. This space travel-theme amusement park features various thrill rides, including roller coasters, a splash ride, a 98m (328-ft.) high Ferris wheel, and Space Dome, in which visitors take a "shuttle" to a space station and from there embark on journeys to the moon, around the solar system, or through a black hole. Entertainment shows, theaters, a space museum that contains an Apollo capsule and other items, and kiddie rides are also offered. An all-inclusive pass costs ¥3,800 (\$32) for adults (junior-high age and older), ¥2,800 (\$23) for children ages 4 through elementary-school age, and free for seniors (proof of age required). Minimum daily open hours are November through March 10am to 5pm, and April through October 9:30am to 5pm, with extended hours many holidays and weekends. To reach Space World, take a JR Kaisoku (express) train from Fukuoka's Hakata Station directly to Space World Station. The trip time is about 60 minutes, and the park is a 5-minute walk from the station. If you have a JR Rail Pass, it's quicker to take the Shinkansen bullet train 20 minutes from Hakata Station to Kokura Station, transferring there to a local line for the 10-minute ride to Space World. Likewise, if you're coming from Honshu via Shinkansen, transfer in Kokura.

WHERE TO STAY EXPENSIVE

Grand Hyatt Fukuoka 大都會 飯店 福岡 Rated among the top five hotels in Japan according to a survey conducted by a prestigious Japanese magazine, these accommodations boast the city's most spectacular setting—the innovative Canal City Hakata. Its black-marbled lobby has a curved facade that overlooks the shopping complex, but for guests who desire solitude, the hotel also has its private roof

garden. Service throughout the hotel is superb—along the order of “Your wish is our command.” Spacious rooms, with views of the private garden or the river and its night scenes, provide every luxury, but if that’s not enough, for an additional charge you can have Grand Club service that includes complimentary breakfast, evening cocktails, and free use of the fitness center. Besides all the luxury, a stay at the Grand Hyatt is fun, with Canal City’s many shops and restaurants right next door.

1–2–82 Sumiyoshi, Hakata-ku, Fukuoka 812-0018. ☎ 800/591-1234 in the U.S. or 092/282-1234. Fax 092/282-2817. www.grandhyattfukuoka.com. 370 units. ¥18,000–¥30,000 (\$150–\$250) single; ¥23,000–¥35,000 (\$192–\$292) double or twin. Grand Club ¥6,000 (\$50) extra per room. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Nakasu-Kawabata (exit 5, 10 min.). Station: Hakata (west exit, 15 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Continental, Cantonese, Japanese, and a sophisticated food court with specialty counters); 2 bars; lounge; fitness center and spa with 25m (82-ft.) indoor pool (fee: ¥3,000/\$25; free for Grand Club guests); 24-hr. concierge; Canal City shopping arcade; salon; room service (6:30am–midnight, Fri and Sat until 2am); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms, executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

Il Palazzo ★★ Eye-catching with its brick-warehouse-meets-Art-Deco-temple architecture, this uniquely designed boutique hotel is the hotel of choice for artists, designers, and other creative folks. Although rooms come with all the amenities, the design goes beyond the usual. Rooms, even singles, are large for Japan and have marbled bathrooms thoughtfully divided by a large glass plate into “wet” areas (shower/bathtub) and “dry” areas (sink and toilet). Canal City Hakata is just across the river. The highest rates in each category below are those charged on Saturdays and evenings before holidays.

3–13–1 Haruyoshi, Chuo-ku, Fukuoka 810-0003. ☎ 092/716-3333. Fax 092/724-3330. 62 units. ¥13,000–¥15,000 (\$108–\$125) single; ¥22,000–¥25,000 (\$183–\$208) double; ¥21,000–¥24,000 (\$175–\$200) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Nakasu-Kawabata Station (exit 1, 8 min.). Walk straight toward the river, turn left, walk along the river to the 2nd bridge, cross it, and turn left. Bus: 68 and any other bus going down Kokutai-Doro Ave. to Minami Shinchi (4 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Italian, coffee shop); 2 bars; room service (4–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

MODERATE

Canal City Fukuoka Washington Hotel *Value* Though part of a nationwide business-hotel chain, this Washington is different—it has more style and lots of pluses. For one thing, it’s located in Canal City Hakata, Fukuoka’s number one shopping and entertainment complex, offering convenience right outside the front door. In addition, its rooms come with extras not usually found in business hotels. All singles, which have semi-double beds, face the Grand Hyatt above the Canal City complex, while twins and triples have better views outward toward the city. Lobby computers connect you to the Internet for ¥100 (85¢) for 10 minutes. The downside: Its good location makes it popular and you’ll find the lobby crowded at check-in and checkout times.

1–2–20 Sumiyoshi, Hakata-ku, Fukuoka 812-0018. ☎ 092/282-8800. Fax 092/282-0757. 423 units. ¥7,900–¥9,500 (\$66–\$79) single; ¥16,000 (\$144) double; ¥15,000–¥16,500 (\$125–\$138) twin; ¥18,000 (\$150) triple. ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra Sat and evenings before holidays. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Nakasu-Kawabata (exit 5, 10 min.). Station: Hakata (west exit, 10 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Western and Japanese); Canal City shopping arcade; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Dukes Hotel ★ Flower boxes, plants, and evergreens outside the front door hint that this is no ordinary hotel. Indeed, it’s an inexpensive hotel with class, with a small but very civilized lobby that exudes charm and invites you to linger with its Chinese vases, palm trees, antiques, and classical music. Most of the rooms,

simple but comfy, are singles, with only nine twins and nine doubles. A thoughtful touch is the folding make-up mirror at the desk, and there's even a ladies' floor for extra security, with pink pajamas instead of the usual cotton kimono. In the world of cloned business hotels, this establishment is a welcome relief.

Farther from the station (4 min. from the Nakasukawabata subway stop), **Dukes Hotel Nakasu** (1-1 Nakasunakashima-machi Hakataku; ☎ 092/283-2800) offers the same amenities and style at a cheaper price.

2-3-9 Hakataeki-mae, Hakata-ku, Fukuoka 812-0011. ☎ 092/472-1800. Fax 092/472-1900. 153 units. ¥7,800–¥8,700 (\$65–\$73) single; ¥12,000 (\$100) double; ¥13,000 (\$108) twin. AE, MC, V. Station: Hakata (2 min.). From the west (Hakata) exit, take the road straight ahead (the one between the Fukuoka City Bank and the red stone Center Building); it's down this street on your right in the 2nd block. **Amenities:** Restaurant (coffee shop); souvenir/convenience shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed dataport (half the rooms), fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet, trouser press (except on ladies' floor).

JR Kyushu Hotel Fukuoka One block east of Hakata Station, this hotel beckons with a flower-lined entranceway and a European-style lobby. New, clean rooms are larger than those in most business hotels and are furnished with pastel quilts on beds and blonde wood desks, sitting areas, and bedside tables. All singles face another building, but twins have glass doors opening onto balconies, making them seem bigger and brighter. In addition, glass doors on bathrooms seem to add space to the tiled bathrooms, which, except in the cheapest singles, offer enough counter space. Though there are no doubles per se, two can tough it out in a single room with a semi-double-size bed for ¥12,300 (\$103). A ladies' floor offers specialized amenities. The best reason to stay here? Those with Japan Rail Passes receive a discount. Other pluses are the next-door 24-hour convenience store and an Irish pub called Half Penny.

2-2-4 Hakataeki-Higashi, Hakata-ku, Fukuoka 812-0013. ☎ 092/413-8787. Fax 092/413-9746. www.jrk-hotels.com. 90 units. ¥7,500–¥7,800 (\$63–\$65) single; ¥12,800 (\$107) twin. 10% discount with Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Hakata (a 2-min. walk from the east "Chikushi" Shinkansen exit). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, coffee shop); concierge; in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers; same-day laundry/dry cleaning; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

Hakata JBB Hotel In the heart of the city, within easy walking distance of Canal City Hakata, the Asian Art Museum, and other attractions, this is a simple but very well-managed establishment under the watchful eye of friendly Yamada-san, who speaks English and offers coffee free of charge in the lobby. Open-air passageways lead to tiny but well-kept rooms complete with toothbrush, shampoo, and pajamas. Beds are semi-double in size and are for single use, but married couples or two women can room together for ¥5,715 (\$48). You won't find anything in the city center cheaper than this.

6-5-1 Reisen-machi, Hakata-ku, Fukuoka 812-0039. ☎ 092/263-8300. Fax 092/263-8301. 59 units. ¥4,500 (\$38) single; ¥5,715 (\$48) double. No credit cards. Subway: Gion (exit 2, 4 min.). Beside the Hakata Machiya Folk Museum. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, no phone.

Toyoko Inn Hakata Gion This clean, efficient, and inexpensive inn is popular with young travelers and businessmen. As with all Toyoko Inns, two computers in the lobby provide free Internet access (high-speed Internet access is also available free in guest rooms), there are free nightly movies (in Japanese only), and a complimentary breakfast is served consisting of a rice ball, soup, and coffee. Western-style rooms are simply furnished but offer a large window that opens and a huge full-length mirror that mitigates tiny quarters. Book a room early for summer, since rooms go quickly at these rates. Note that check-in is not until 4pm.

1–38 Gion-cho, Hakata-ku, Fukuoka 812-0038. ☎ 092/281-1045. Fax 092/281-1046. www.toyoko-inn.com. 176 units. ¥5,300–¥6,200 (\$44–\$52) single; ¥7,300–¥8,300 (\$61–\$69) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Gion (exit 5, 1 min.). Station: Hakata (8 min.). Take the west Hakata exit and walk down Taihaku-dori Ave.; it will be on your left. **Amenities:** In-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies, high-speed dataport, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, trouser press.

WHERE TO DINE

For one-stop dining, head to **Canal City Hakata** 🌟, a 10-minute walk west of Hakata Station or a 10-minute walk from the Nakasu-Kawabata subway station. You'll find dozens of restaurants in this shopping complex, situated around a canal and water fountains and offering everything from Chinese, Italian, and Japanese cuisine to fast food and bar snacks. There's something for every pocketbook here—you can opt for formal dining or order takeout and sit outside to watch the fountains. Set meals range from about ¥800 to ¥5,000 (\$6.65–\$42), and most restaurants are open from 11am to 11pm daily. Another good choice is in the adjoining Grand Hyatt Hotel's Grand Plaza on the Canal level, offering cafes as well as Italian and Japanese food.

For a bit more local flavor, head to one of Fukuoka's famous 200 *yatai* stalls (street-side food stalls). Most are located in Tenjin and along the Nakagawa River, on Nakasu Island south of Kokutai-Doro Avenue. Most stalls sell *ramen* (Chinese noodles), though some also serve oden, yakitori, tempura, and other simple fare. They're open from about 6pm to 2am. Many nighttime revelers stop here before or after a cruise through the Nakasu entertainment district. Choose a stall and sit down, and you'll be served a steaming bowl of ramen, most of which average about ¥800 (\$6.65).

Aroma's EUROPEAN Located on the lobby floor of the Grand Hyatt, which has a great location in Canal City, this upbeat, modern restaurant has a great lunch buffet serving mostly Mediterranean-inspired cuisine, including salads, antipasta, soup, and fish and meat entrees. In the evening, you can choose a set meal, or opt for a combination buffet/set meal that allows you to help yourself to an appetizer and dessert buffet and order your soup and main dish from a menu.

Grand Hyatt Fukuoka, 1–2–82 Sumiyoshi. ☎ 092/282-1234. Buffet lunch ¥1,800 (\$15) weekday, ¥2,000 (\$17) weekends and holidays; buffet/set meal ¥3,500 (\$20); set dinner ¥5,000 (\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm. Subway: Nakasu-Kawabata (exit 5, 10 min.). Station: Hakata (west exit, 15 min.).

②12 **Kazaguruma LOCAL SPECIALTIES** In a relocated farmhouse accented with heavy wooden beams, this lively and tasty izakaya-style Japanese pub specializes in fresh fish. (An izakaya is a Japanese-style bar with beer, sake, and Japanese food, generally open only from 5 or 6pm.) Since the catch of the day is written only in Japanese, you might try asking a neighboring diner for help with translations (this is a friendly place). Or order one of the all-you-can-drink set meals: The ¥3,000 (\$25) set meal consists of an appetizer, sashimi, a boiled dish, a fried dish, salad, and rice; while the ¥3,500 (\$29) set meal offers dishes specially chosen by the chef. To find the restaurant, look for the large wooden sign hanging over the doorway and the decorative thatched roof.

Dangam Building 1F, 1–13–1 Hakata-eki Higashi. ☎ 092/481-3456. Main dishes ¥350–¥700 (\$2.90–\$5.85); set dinner ¥3,000 and ¥3,500 (\$25 and \$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 5pm–midnight. Station: Hakata (1-min. walk from the east Chikushi exit). Walk straight ahead, cross the main street, and take the 1st alley.

②13 **Ume no Hana VEGETARIAN/TOFU** Located along the Naka River on Nakasu Island, this restful and low-key chain is known for its appetizing low-calorie, light vegetarian cuisine. It offers a variety of meals centered on tofu and

vegetables, though some set meals may include fish and seafood. It's simply decorated in that sparse yet elegant Japanese way, with seating at low tables with leg wells.

Hakata Excel Tokyu Hotel, 2nd floor, 4-6-7 Nakasu. ☎ 092/262-3777. Set dinner ¥2,000–¥6,000 (\$17–\$50); set lunch ¥1,200–¥1,800 (\$10–\$15). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5pm–2am. Subway: Nakasu-Kawabata (2 min.).

2 Beppu, King of the Hot-Spring Spas ★★

1,228km (763 miles) SW of Tokyo; 186km (116 miles) SE of Fukuoka

Beppu gushes forth more hot-spring water than anywhere else in Japan. With approximately 2,850 hot springs spewing forth 130,000 kiloliters (33.8 million gal.) of water daily (enough to fill 3,600 25m/82-ft. pools), it has long been one of the country's best-known spa resorts. Some 11 million people come to Beppu every year to relax and rejuvenate themselves in one of the city's 114 public bath-houses, and they do so in a number of unique ways: They sit in mud baths up to their necks, they bury themselves in hot black sand, they soak in hot springs, and on New Year's they bathe in water filled with floating orange peels. They even drink hot-spring water and eat food cooked by its steam.

Bathing reigns supreme here—and I suggest you join in the fun. After all, visiting Beppu without enjoying the baths would be like going to a world-class restaurant with your own TV dinner.

Not a very large town, with a population of 125,000, Beppu is situated on Kyushu's eastern coast in a curve of Beppu Bay, bounded on one side by the sea and on the other by steep hills and mountains. On cold days, steam rises everywhere throughout the city, escaping from springs and pipes and giving the town an otherworldly appearance. Indeed, nine of the hot springs look so much like hell that that's what they're called—Jigoku, the Hells. But rather than a place most people try to avoid, the Hells are a major tourist attraction. In fact, everything in Beppu is geared toward tourism, and if you're interested in rubbing elbows with Japanese on vacation—particularly the older generation—this is one of the best places to do so.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane The nearest airport is in Oita, a 40-minute bus ride away (bus fare: ¥1,450/\$12); flights from Tokyo's Haneda airport (ANA, JAL, JAS) take about 1½ hours and cost ¥30,000 (\$250) one-way.

By Train From Tokyo, go by Shinkansen to Kokura and then transfer to a limited express bound for Beppu; the trip takes nearly 7 hours (not including transfers) and costs ¥24,920 (\$208) for an unreserved seat. There are also a few direct trains daily from Hakata Station in Fukuoka (fare: ¥5,250/\$43) and from Kumamoto (fare: ¥5,130/\$42), both taking about 3 hours.

By Ferry Ferries make nightly runs to Beppu from Osaka (with a stop in Kobe), with fares beginning at ¥7,400 (\$62); at last check, ferries departed Osaka's South Pier at 6:30pm and 9pm, arriving the next morning at 6:20am and 10:10am respectively. Contact tourist offices in Osaka or Kobe (see chapter 8) or the Kansai Kisen company in Osaka (☎ 06/6572-5181) for more information.

From Shikoku, the most practical ferry is fromYawatahama, running five times daily and costing ¥ 1,770 (\$15) one-way for the 2½-hour trip; contact the **Uwajima Unyu Co.** for information (☎ 0894/23-2536). The ferry from Matsuyama, also on Shikoku, departs once daily and costs ¥2,600 (\$22) for the 2¼-hour trip; it's run by the **Soreyu Express Co.** (☎ 0892/505-0077).

VISITOR INFORMATION Before leaving Tokyo, Kyoto, or the Narita or Kansai airports, pick up a copy of the leaflet “Beppu and Vicinity” at the Tourist Information Center.

In Beppu, the **Beppu Tourist Information Office** (☎ 0977/24-2838; open daily 8:30am–5:30pm) is located in Beppu Station at the east (main) exit. In addition, the **Foreign Tourist Information Office** (☎ 0977/23-1119; open Mon–Sat 9am–5pm and some Sun), though less convenient at the north end of the station in a small shopping complex, is geared toward foreign visitors and is staffed by volunteers. More information is available on the Internet at www.beppu-navi.jp.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND **Beppu Station** is located near the center of the city. Its main exit is to the east and the sea, while to the west lie the Hells and the majority of hot-spring baths. Because most destinations are not within walking distance, the easiest ways to get around Beppu are by bus and by taxi. Of the two bus companies serving Beppu, the **Kamenoi Bus Company** (☎ 0977/23-0141) is the largest and serves most of the city. Bus fares begin at ¥140 (\$1.15) and increase according to the distance, but if you plan on doing a lot of sightseeing, there’s a 1-day pass called **My Beppu Free**—which nonetheless costs ¥900 (\$7.50) for adults, half price for children under 12. It allows unlimited travel on Kamenoi Company buses (which are blue) in the city as well as slight discounts on a few attractions. Three-day and 5-day passes that include guided tours are also available. You can purchase the passes at the local tourist office at Beppu Station.

TAKING THE WATERS

Beppu is divided into eight hot-spring areas, each with its own mineral content and natural characteristics. Although any hot-spring bath can help stimulate metabolism and blood circulation and create a general feeling of well-being, there are specific springs with various mineral contents that the Japanese believe help relieve ailments ranging from rheumatism and diabetes to skin disease. The tourist office has a pamphlet so you can select the baths that will benefit you the most. And whatever you do, don’t rinse off with plain water after taking your bath because this will wash away all those helpful minerals. You should bring your own towel and, for some places, a *yukata* (cotton kimono), though the latter is also available for sale or for rent.

SUGINOI ★★

Suginoi Palace (☎ 0977/24-1160), a 10-minute bus ride from Beppu Station on bus no. 10, is one of the best-known baths in all of Japan and also one of the largest. Making good use of its hilltop views, it features cascading waters, terraced pools, steam rooms, saunas, pits with hot sand to bury yourself in, waterfall massages (great for shoulders and backs), baths of stone pebbles you can tread upon to massage your feet, and Korean-style heated floors upon which you can lie down and relax, all in sophisticated facilities separated for men and women.

As if that weren’t enough, Suginoi Palace also has an outdoor waterfall and a pond filled with greedy carp (buy some fish food and you’ll see what I mean—they almost jump out of the water in their frenzy), a small landscaped garden, and bowling lanes. The attached Uzone complex offers arcade games and fast-food vendors.

Admission to the Suginoi Palace bath complex, open daily from 9am to 10:30pm, costs ¥2,000 (\$17) for adults and ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for children 4 to 12 if you enter before 5pm. Save money by going after 5pm, when it’s half price. If,

however, you're staying at the Suginoi Hotel (p. 505), you have free use of the baths daily from 9am to 11pm.

If you're shy about disrobing in front of strangers or have kids in tow, you might want to visit the \$5 million extension of the Suginoi bathing experience, **Aqua-Beat** (☎ 0977/26-7600). It's a water park with water slides (great fun!), children's pools, a simulated wave pool, an artificial beach, outdoor hot springs, a sound-and-light show, and a Jacuzzi. A bar-coded locker key on a wristband allows you to lock up your valuables, wear your bathing suit (rental suits available), and dine without having to worry about carrying money; upon exiting, you'll simply feed it into a machine to get your bill. Admission is ¥2,800 (\$23) for adults, ¥1,700 (\$14) for students, and ¥1,100 (\$9.15) for children 4 to 12; guests staying in the Suginoi Hotel pay only ¥1,800 (\$15), ¥1,000 (\$8.35), and ¥700 (\$5.85) respectively. General open hours are Monday to Friday 11am to 6pm, Saturday 10am to 9pm, and Sunday and holidays 10am to 7pm, except during Golden Week (end of Apr) and summer vacation (mid-July to Aug), when it's open daily 10am to 9pm. Note, however, that the park closes periodically for maintenance, so check with the tourist office or call in advance.

HYOTAN ONSEN

If Suginoi sounds too huge and touristy, I recommend **Hyotan Onsen** ♀, Kan-nawa 159-2 (☎ 0977/66-0527; open daily 8am-9pm), reached by taking bus no. 20 to Jigokubaru. It's newer, smaller, and more low-key and is considered good for relieving rheumatism, skin disease, and female disorders (such as hormonal changes and female cancers, but not for menstrual cramps because women are not allowed to use the baths when they're menstruating). It also offers open-air baths, pebble baths for your feet, steam baths, waterfall baths, and sand baths. There's a sheet with instructions in English. Admission is ¥700 (\$5.85) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for elementary school-age children, and ¥200 (\$1.65) for children 5 and younger. Four private onsen baths (two with steam rooms) can be rented for ¥2,000 (\$17) per hour. Yukata rental is ¥200 (\$1.65).

HOT-SAND BATHS

One of the unique things you can do in Beppu is take a bath in hot sand, considered useful for treating muscle pain, arthritis, and indigestion. Although several public baths offer hot-sand baths, one of the most atmospheric places is the **Takegawara Bathhouse** ♀♂♂, 16-23 Motomachi, Beppu 874 (☎ 0977/23-1585; open daily 8am-9:30pm, closed 1st and 3rd Wed of each month), a 10-minute walk from Beppu Station. Built in 1879 in traditional, Meiji-Era architecture, this beautiful wooden structure is one of the oldest public baths in the city and has an interior that resembles an ancient gymnasium. Bathing areas are separate for men and women and are dominated by a pit filled with black sand. The attendants are used to foreigners here; they'll instruct you to strip, wash yourself, and then lie down in a hollow they've dug in the sand. Bring your own towel (or buy one here), which you should use to cover your vital parts. An attendant will then shovel sand on top of you and pack you in until only your head and feet are sticking out. I personally didn't find the sand all that hot, but it is relaxing as the heat soaks into your body. You stay buried for 10 minutes, contemplating the wooden ceiling high above and hoping you don't get an itch somewhere. When the time is up, the attendant will tell you to stand up, shake off the sand, and then jump into a bath of hot water. The cost is ¥780 (\$6.50). To reach the bathhouse, take the main (east) exit from Beppu Station and walk toward the sea, turning right at the street just before the big intersection. The

bathhouse is a couple blocks down this street on the right, with its entrance around the corner.

MORE TO SEE & DO

THE HELLS (JIGOKU) You might as well join everyone else and go to the Hells, boiling ponds created by volcanic activity. Their Japanese name, Jigoku, refers to the burning hell of Buddhist sutras. Six of the nine Hells are clustered close together in the Kannawa hot-spring area, within walking distance of each other, and they can be toured in about an hour or so. However, since they're kind of hokey, you might just want to visit a couple. Each Hell has its own attraction. **Umi Jigoku**, or Sea Hell, is the color of sea water; **Chinoike Jigoku**, the Blood-Pond Hell, is blood red in color because of the red clay dissolved in the hot water; **Yama Jigoku** features animals living in its hot spring; **Kamado Jigoku**, the Oven Hell, was used for cooking; and **Oniyama Jigoku** is where crocodiles are bred. **Tatsumaki Jigoku**, or Waterspout Hell, has one of the largest geysers in Japan, and with a temperature of 221°F (105°C), it's hotter than any other hot spring in Beppu. To reach Kannawa from Beppu Station, take bus no. 7 to the Kannawa bus stop. From there, you can take bus no. 16 onward to the other three Hells.

The Hells are open daily 8am to 5pm. A combination ticket, costing ¥2,000 (\$17) for adults, ¥1,300 (\$11) for high-school students, ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for junior-high students, and ¥900 (\$7.50) for children, allows entrance to all nine Hells. Otherwise, the separate entrance fee to each one is ¥400 (\$3.35). You can also join a 2½-hour tour of the Hells that includes admission, but it's conducted in Japanese only. There are nine tours a day, departing from Kamenoi Bus Center and costing ¥3,850 (\$32) for adults, ¥3,150 (\$26) for high-school students, ¥2,850 (\$23) for junior-high students, and ¥1,830 (\$15) for children. For more information, contact the **Beppu Tourist Office** (see above) or the **Beppu Jigoku Association** (☎ 0977/66-1577).

(214) JAPAN BAMBOO MUSEUM Beppu is famous for its bamboo crafts, and the best place to shop for bambooware and to learn more about this amazingly durable material is this museum, called **Nihon Take-no-Hakubutsukan** (6–8–19 Ishigaki-higashi; ☎ 0977/25-7776; open daily 8:30am–5pm). Exhibits explain how bamboo grows, the different varieties of bamboo (630 kinds are found in Japan), and the role bamboo has played in Japanese life. Bamboo products from all over Japan are on display, including palanquins, fish traps, lunch boxes, rakes, fans, hats, bows, and arrows. Even Edison's electric light bulb used a bamboo filament. There are also demonstrations of basket weaving. Admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for junior-high and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children. To reach it, take Kamenoi no. 23 bus to Yoshihirojinjamae; from there, it's a 2-minute walk to this brown brick building.

THE MONKEYS OF TAKASAKIYAMA MOUNTAIN On Beppu's southern border rises Takasakiyama Mountain. Its peak, home to some 1,700 wild monkeys, is one of Japan's largest monkey habitats (☎ 097/532-5010). Some 1,200 of them come down every day to feed, returning to their homes by late afternoon. They wander freely among the visitors, though humans are advised not to challenge them by looking directly into their eyes. Admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults and ¥250 (\$2.10) for children, and it's open daily 8:30am to 5pm. From Beppu Station, take an Oita Kotsu Bus for Takasakiyama (there is no bus number), a 10-minute ride; unfortunately, your My Beppu Free pass isn't accepted on this bus, so you'll have to pay ¥230 (\$1.90).

WHERE TO STAY

As with many hot-spring spas, Beppu levies a hot-springs tax: ¥150 (\$1.25) per person, per night. In addition, some places raise their rates during New Year's, Golden Week (Apr 29–May 5), Obon (mid-Aug), Saturdays, and the evenings before holidays.

EXPENSIVE

(215) Kannawaen ★★☆☆ If it's peace and quiet you're searching for, here's the place for you: a wonderful, 110-year-old ryokan hidden away on a lushly landscaped hill not far from the Hells. It actually consists of six separate houses spread around its grounds, and its tatami rooms with shoji screens look out onto carefully tended gardens, hot springs, bamboo, streams, bonsai, stone lanterns, flowers, and different kinds of cherry trees. This is the perfect place to escape the crowds and to relax in a meandering, open-air bath set among rocks and trees; its water is said to change color seven times a day depending on the intensity of the sunlight. Most rooms don't have a private bathroom, but the beauty of the surroundings more than makes up for that. Even members of the imperial family and prime ministers have stayed here.

Kannawa, Beppu 874-0045. ☎ 0977/66-2111. Fax 0977/66-2113. 12 units (4 with bathroom). ¥27,000–¥40,000 (\$225–\$333) per person. ¥3,000 (\$25) extra on weekends. Rates include 2 meals and service charge. AE, MC, V. Taxi: A 15-min. ride from Beppu Station. (No bus goes directly to this hotel, so with luggage you'll have to take a taxi.) **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Suginoi Hotel ★☆☆☆☆ *Kids* Probably the best-known hotel in Beppu, Suginoi is famous for the adjoining Suginoi Palace, a huge bathing complex with hot-spring baths (which hotel guests can use for free), a water park great for kids (discounts for hotel guests), and more. Situated on a wooded hill with a sweeping view of the city and sea below, it's a lively and noisy hotel, filled with good-natured vacationers. If you like being in the middle of the action, this is the place for you. The hotel is divided into two wings, each with its own check-in counter. The older main building is larger, catering primarily to families and groups with Japanese-style rooms and twins and including two buffet-style meals in its price. The newer Hana wing is more European in atmosphere with mostly Western-style rooms. Both wings also have combination-style rooms, featuring both beds and a separate tatami area. Rates are based on the type of room; those facing inland are slightly cheaper than those with fantastic sea views. With all the kiddie diversions—the water park, the game room, cheap eats in adjoining Suginoi Palace (even a McDonald's)—this is a good choice for families.

Kankaiji, Beppu 874-0822. ☎ 0977/24-1141. Fax 0977/21-0010. www.suginoi-hotel.com. 570 units. Without meals, ¥13,500–¥22,500 (\$113–\$187) single, ¥19,000–¥27,000 (\$158–\$225) twin. Rates with 2 buffet meals, ¥14,000–¥29,000 (\$117–\$242) per person. Rates higher in peak season. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 10 from Beppu Station to Suginoi Palace. Taxi: 8 min. **Amenities:** 8 restaurants; 4 bars; Suginoi Palace with its hot-spring baths and other attractions (see "Taking the Waters," above); 2 24-hr. hot-spring baths for guests only; game room; shopping arcade; salon; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea; hair dryer.

MODERATE

Hotel Seawave Convenient to the station, this interestingly designed hotel is true to its name with a marine theme that includes porthole windows and nautical decor. Even the *yukata* (cotton kimono) provided in each room is imprinted with ships. Yet despite the nautical motifs, the vending machines in the halls, and the trouser presses in the rooms that give it a slightly business-hotel atmosphere, the hotel seems more feminine than masculine. Each room

has individual touches such as different-colored tiles in every bathroom and original murals, some with an aqua theme. The cheapest singles have single-size beds, but all other rooms have double-size beds. You'll find the lobby, which offers computers with free Internet access, on the second floor, and the reception staff speaks English. The drawback? There's no *onsen* (hot-spring bath) here, but ask at the front desk for free tickets to Eki-mae onsen around the corner.

12–8 Ekimae-cho, Beppu 874-0935. ☎ 0977/27-1311. Fax 0977/27-1310. 92 units. ¥6,000–¥6,600 (\$50–\$55) single; ¥8,000–¥10,000 (\$67–\$83) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Across the street from Beppu Station's main (east) exit, catty-corner to the right. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western); bar; in-room massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea; hair dryer.

②16 **Sakaeya** ★★ (Finds) The oldest *minshuku* in the city, this is one of the best places to stay near the Hells. There are several interesting features here that have utilized the hot springs for decades. Old radiators, for example, are heated naturally from hot springs. Another relic is the stone oven (*jigokugama*) in the courtyard, which uses steam from hot springs for cooking (many older homes in Beppu still use such ovens). Use of the oven is free in case you want to cook your own meals, but there's also a modern kitchen you can use. I recommend, however, that you opt for rates that include meals. Most of your dinner will be steamed using the hot springs and then served in a Japanese dining room with whitewashed walls and a heavy timbered ceiling. In winter, the *kotatsu* (a table with a heating element and covered with a blanket to keep legs warm) in the dining room is steam heated. Most of the rooms—all are Japanese style—have sinks, and all come with cotton yukata and refrigerator. The oldest rooms, which don't have bathrooms but are very nice, date from the Meiji Period (1868–1912), while those with private bathroom are in a newer addition that nonetheless maintains a traditional atmosphere with sitting alcoves.

Ida, Kannawa, Beppu 874-0043. ☎ 0977/66-6234. Fax 0977/66-6235. 12 units (7 with bathroom). Without meals, ¥3,500 (\$29) single without bathroom, ¥5,000 (\$42) single with bathroom; ¥7,000 (\$72) double without bathroom, ¥10,000 (\$83) double with bathroom. Rates with 2 meals, ¥8,000–¥10,000 (\$67–\$83) per person without bathroom, ¥13,000–¥20,000 (\$108–\$167) per person with bathroom. Rates higher during holidays, including Golden Week (Apr 29–May 5) and New Year's. No credit cards. Bus: Kamenoi no. 7 from Beppu Station's west exit 16 min. to Kannawa (6 min.; walk down the hill and take the 2nd left). Or take an Oita bus (no number) and get off at Jigokubara (2 min.; take the 1st left). Sakaeya is between the 2 companies' bus stops. **Amenities:** Indoor hot-spring baths. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

INEXPENSIVE

Kokage In operation for 30 years, this *minshuku*, run by a friendly man who speaks a bit of English, is a member of the Japanese Inn Group. There are both Japanese and twin rooms, which are simple but furnished with yukata, towels, and air conditioner. Those with bathrooms have hot-spring water. There's also a public, rock-lined, hot-spring bath, and meals are served in a homey dining room with a cluttered but interesting collection of antique lamps, clocks, and other items. If you like, the owners will fit you out in a wedding kimono and take your picture with your camera.

8–9 Ekimaecho, Beppu 874-0935. ☎ 0977/23-1753. Fax 0977/23-3895. 13 units (10 with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) single with bathroom; ¥7,000 (\$58) twin with bathroom; ¥9,000 (\$75) triple without bathroom, ¥10,500 (\$88) triple with bathroom. Breakfast ¥800 (\$6.65) extra; Japanese dinner ¥1,800 (\$15) extra. AE, MC, V. Station: Beppu (2-min. walk from station's main east exit); walk straight ahead for 2 blocks to a stop-light, turn right, and then turn immediately right again into a small alley. **Amenities:** Coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

②17 **Yokoso** Housed in a beige-colored, two-story building, Yokoso offers what are probably the cheapest rooms in all of Beppu. Run by English-speaking,

third-generation innkeepers, it has Japanese-style rooms that are clean and equipped with only the basics. Air-conditioning in summer is coin operated, but steam heating is free. No meals are served, but a communal kitchen is available for do-it-yourselfers, complete with a refrigerator and hot springs-powered oven. Four public baths boast water from hot springs, and around the corner in an annex are 25 more rooms, a *rotenburo* (outdoor bath), and a carp pond in a garden.

Ida 3 Kumi, Kanawa, Beppu 874-0043. ☎ 0979/66-0440. Fax 0979/66-0440. 35 units. ¥3,200 (\$27) per person; ¥3,000 (\$25) per person for stays of more than 7 days. Rates include tax. No credit cards. Bus: Oita to Jigokubara (3 min.; around the corner from Sakaeya, above). **Amenities:** In-room massage; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* Coin-op A/C, coin-op TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

②18 **Biliken** VARIED JAPANESE It is easy to spot this restaurant on the main street halfway between the station and the sea because of the picture over the doorway of Biliken—a curious-looking, bald-headed, round-tummied god who is said to bring good luck. Popular with shoppers, businessmen, and families, the place is managed by English-speaking Hideko-san and her husband. A display case outside and a picture menu make ordering easy for Japanese meals that include tempura, sushi, noodles, grilled fish, and other dishes, and seating is on tatami or at dark lacquered tables.

2-1-18 Kitahama. ☎ 0977/21-2088. Main dishes ¥500–¥1,300 (\$4.15–\$11); set meal ¥750–¥2,100 (\$6.25–\$18). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–9:30pm. A 4-min. walk from Beppu Station.

②19 **Jin** GRILLED FOODS If you're looking for a quick, inexpensive place for dinner near the train station, you'll find plenty of them in and around the main exit. Jin is one of these, a lively robatayaki featuring grilled foods, including skewered meats, vegetables, and fish, as well as salads and sashimi. There's an English-language menu, though its prices are outdated.

1-15-7 Kitahama. ☎ 0977/21-1768. Main dishes ¥500–¥1,500 (\$4.15–\$13). MC, V. Daily 5pm–midnight. A 6-min. walk from Beppu Station. Walk straight down the main street leading away from the main (east) exit to the end. Jin is on the right, across the street from the Tokiwa department store and just before the big intersection; look for its sign with a monkey and JINY written on it.

3 Off the Beaten Path: Miyazaki

1,448km (900 miles) SW of Tokyo; 407km (254 miles) SE of Fukuoka; 126km (79 miles) W of Kagoshima

The capital of Miyazaki Prefecture, **Miyazaki City** is one of the largest (population: 306,000) and most important cities in southern Kyushu. As all Japanese schoolchildren know, it boasts several famous sites relating to Japan's first emperor, Jimmu. Yet it seems isolated, even somewhat neglected, by the rest of Japan. Tokyo is far away, and Japanese honeymooners, who only a few decades ago favored Miyazaki over most other domestic destinations, are now flocking to Hawaii and Australia.

To counter its downward spiral into touristic oblivion, in the 1990s Miyazaki developed a large resort called **Seagaia** on its wooded outskirts, complete with hotels, golf courses, a zoo, the world's largest indoor water park, and other attractions. The plan worked: Miyazaki is now a major stop for Asian tour groups making the rounds of Kyushu's theme parks. But beyond that, Miyazaki is a perfect place to relax, swim in the Pacific Ocean, get in some rounds of golf, and savor local delicacies. Temperatures here are the second warmest in Japan after Okinawa's (it shares the same approximate latitude with Jerusalem and San Diego), and flowers bloom throughout the year. The natives are warm and kind, maybe because they still don't see many foreigners here, particularly Westerners.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane There are daily flights to Miyazaki from most major Japanese cities; ANA offers the most flights from Tokyo's Haneda Airport. Flight time is 1½ hours from Tokyo (with a one-way ticket costing ¥31,000/\$258), 1 hour from Osaka, and 45 minutes from Fukuoka. From the airport, a bus travels to Miyazaki Station in 25 minutes and costs ¥400 (\$3.35). Buses also travel from the airport to Seagaia for ¥800 (\$6.65). There's also JR train service from the airport to Miyazaki Station; if you don't have a Japan Rail Pass, the fare is ¥340 (\$2.85).

By Train From Tokyo, take the Hikari Shinkansen bullet train to Kokura and transfer there to the Nichirin limited express; the entire trip takes approximately 10 hours (not including transfers) and costs ¥24,780 (\$207) for an unreserved seat. There are also direct trains from Fukuoka's Hakata Station (5 hr.), Beppu (3½ hr.), and Kagoshima (2 hr.).

By Bus Buses depart daily from Hakata Station in Fukuoka for Miyazaki (trip time: 4½ hr.), costing ¥6,000 (\$50) one-way. Buses also depart from Kagoshima's Nishi Kagoshima Station; the fare is ¥2,700 (\$23) for the 2¾-hour trip. Long-distance buses arrive at the bus station in front of Miyazaki Station.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before departing Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai airports, pick up the leaflet "Miyazaki and Vicinity" at the Tourist Information Center.

For more pamphlets on the city in English, stop off at the tourist information center at either **Miyazaki Airport** (☎ 0985/51-5114; open daily 7am–9pm) or the east exit of **JR Miyazaki Station** (☎ 0985/22-6469; open daily 9am–7pm Mar–Nov, to 6:30pm Dec–Feb). Among the various good pamphlets available, be sure to pick up *Rakuen Resort Miyazaki*, *Miyazaki City Tourist Guide*, and a map. Information on Miyazaki Prefecture is available online at www.pref.miyazaki.jp/english.

MAIL & ATMS The **Miyazaki Central Post Office**, 1–1–34 Takachiho-dori (☎ 0985/24-3424), is located on the right side of Takachiho-dori Avenue if you're walking from Miyazaki Station, about an 8-minute walk away. It's open daily 24 hours a day. In addition to ATMs that accept foreign credit cards, it also has a money-exchange counter open Monday through Friday 9am to 6pm.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND Downtown lies west of Miyazaki Station, about a 10-minute walk away. From Miyazaki Station, take Takachiho-dori Avenue west to **Tachibana-dori**, the main street in town, which is lined with shops, department stores, and restaurants. Almost all city buses serving other parts of town, as well as buses traveling to other cities in Miyazaki Prefecture, make stops along this main thoroughfare—at Depaato-mae bus stop at the intersection of Takachiho- and Tachibana-dori; and at Tachibana-dori 3-chome bus stop, which is farther south. Otherwise, there are two major bus terminals: The **Miyazaki Kotsu Bus Terminal** (also called Miyazaki Unko Center) is just outside the west exit of Miyazaki Station, and the **Miyako-City Bus Center** is a few minutes' walk from the JR Minami Miyazaki Station (take the south exit and turn left; you'll see the bus center 1 block ahead on your right).

Miyazaki Shrine, Miyazaki prefectural museums, and Heiwadai Park are located northwest of Miyazaki Station, while the Seagaia resort area is located on the coast northeast of Miyazaki Station. All these attractions are easily reached by bus from Miyazaki Station or Tachibana-dori. Fares start at ¥140 (\$1.15) and

increase according to the distance. There is also local train service from Miyazaki Station to Miyazaki Jingu Eki station near Miyazaki Shrine.

GUIDED TOURS Although all the sights listed below are accessible by public transportation, they're quite spread out. You may, therefore, want to join an organized tour, which is conducted only in Japanese but will at least get you to each destination, thereby eliminating worries about time schedules and bus stops. A 12-hour tour operated by **Miyazaki Kotsu Bus Company** (☎ 0985/52-7111) departs at 8am daily from Miyako-City Bus Center and visits Miyazaki Shrine, Heiwadai Park, Kodomo-no-Kuni (an amusement park for children), Aoshima Island, Horikiri Pass (a scenic viewpoint taking in the lush subtropical vegetation and coast line), Cactus Park (a cactus garden that will look all too familiar to anyone from southwestern U.S. or other such climes), and Udo Shrine. Toward the end of the tour, the bus stops at Seagaia at 5:35pm and returns to the Miyako-City Bus Center at 8pm. Called the "Nichinan Kaigan Course," it costs ¥4,000 (\$33) for adults and ¥2,000 (\$17) for children.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

MIYAZAKI SHRINE & ENVIRONS

The most important shrine in town is **Miyazaki Shrine (Miyazaki Jingu)** ★, 2-4-1 Jingu (☎ 0985/27-4004), located about a 10-minute walk west of JR Miyazaki Jingu Station. It's dedicated to the first emperor of Japan, Emperor Jimmu, a somewhat mythical figure who established the Yamato Court in 660 B.C. and is believed to be the ancestor of every reigning emperor since. Although the shrine is thought to have originated around the time of Emperor Jimmu's reign some 2,600 years ago, either on a mountaintop or near present-day Heiwadai Park, its ancient history remains shrouded in mystery, much like the emperor himself. Peacefully surrounded by natural woods and majestic cedar, the shrine is built from cedar and is austere plain. The grounds of the shrine are always open and there's no charge for admission. If you don't want to walk to the shrine, you can take a bus bound for Miyazaki Jingu (the name of the stop for Miyazaki Shrine) from Tachibana-dori Avenue (in the center of town) or Miyako-City Bus Center (where the bus departs).

From the shrine, take a left after passing the first torii gate (there's a map of the area here) and walk around the shrine to the east. Four 150- to 200-year-old, thatched-roof Japanese homes have been moved to the park for preservation. You can walk around them and enter some. Admission is free. North of Miyazaki Shrine on shrine grounds is the **Miyazaki Prefectural Museum of Nature and History (Miyazaki-ken Sogo Hakubutsukan)**, 2-4-4 Jingu (☎ 0985/24-2071; open Tues-Sun 9am-5pm). It does an excellent job of presenting the prefecture's animal and plant life, its history, and its folklore with well-designed displays and a wealth of information—what a shame explanations are in Japanese only. Those of you who studied Latin can put it to practice here, as plant and animal specimens are identified in Latin, but for the rest of us there's an English-language pamphlet (which also gives some explanation about the houses mentioned above). In any case, it's worth spending an hour here because there's plenty to look at. Very enlightening is a replica of a home with a wood-burning stove and a bathtub heated with wood—the home dates from the 1950s. Admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for high-school and university students, and ¥100 (85¢) for junior-high students and children. The closest bus stop is Hakubutsukan-mae in front of the museum; board any bus bound for Aya, Kunitomi, or Heiwagaoka from Tachibana-dori.

Finds **Haniwa Garden**

My favorite thing to see in Heiwadai Park (and a good photo op) is **Haniwa Garden** ♡. Archaeological digs in Miyazaki Prefecture have unearthed a multitude of ancient burial mounds and clay figures known as *haniwa*; replicas of these ancient mounds and haniwa clay figures can be seen in Haniwa Garden, where approximately 400 of the figures have been placed between trees on mounds covered with moss. There are warriors, horses, pigs, boats, and houses. I especially like the haniwa with the simple face and body and the O-shaped mouth; it's said to represent a dancing woman. A one-room exhibition house (free, open daily 8:30am–5pm) displays some items found in ancient burial mounds, and you can buy a small clay replica to take home with you.

If you wish to take a bus here, board a bus from Depaato-mae bus stop on Tachibana-dori bound for Heiwadai; get off 12 minutes later at the last stop in front of the park.

West of Miyazaki Shrine, about a 10-minute walk away, is the **Miyazaki Prefectural Art Museum (Miyazaki-kenritsu Bijutsukan)** ♡, 3–210 Funatsuka (☎ 0985/20-3792; open Tues–Sun 10am–6pm). This very modern building presents works of Miyazaki artists from the Edo Period onward, those who illustrate recent artistic trends in Japan, and artists from around the world. Most famous of the local artists is probably Ei-Kyu (1911–1960), an avant-garde pioneer whose last works consisted of dots. Ai-O, a contemporary of Ei-Kyu, is known for his Rainbow series. You can see everything in less than an hour. Admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for university and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children. The closest bus stop is Bunka Koen Mae; board a bus bound for Aya, Heiwagaoka, Ikeuchi, Kunitomi, or Bunka Koen.

HEIWADAI PARK About a 15-minute walk northwest of Miyazaki Shrine is Heiwadai Park, where you'll find the **Peace Tower**, built in 1940 in celebration of the 2,600th anniversary of the mythological foundation of Japan; it purportedly contains artifacts that once belonged to the first emperor. Its pedestal is made with stones donated by Japanese ex-patriates from all over the world, while its copper door was created with coins donated by Japanese children. It may seem ironic that a peace tower was erected at a time when Japan was busy colonizing much of Asia; the intention was to show that the world could live peacefully, albeit with Japan as leader. Figures on the tower depict the guardians of fishery, agriculture, self-defense, and commerce.

THE MANY AMUSEMENTS OF SEAGAIA ♡♡

Seagaia is a convention and resort complex set in a vast national reserve of beautiful pine forest stretching 12km (7½ miles) along the coastline. In addition to hotels, it has amusements too numerous to list. **Miyazaki City Phoenix Zoo** (☎ 0985/39-1306; open Thurs–Tues 9am–5pm) has more than 2,000 animals of 100 species from Asia and Africa; admission is ¥800 (\$6.65) for adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) for students, and ¥300 (\$2.50) for children. Golfers can try out their swings at the private refurbished **Phoenix Country Club** (☎ 0985/39-1301), a 27-hole course with visitor greens fees of ¥30,415 to ¥37,240 (\$253–\$310); or at the more proletarian public **Tom Watson Golf Course** (☎ 0985/21-1188; same website), which has 18 holes and charges a greens fee of ¥17,271 (\$144).

on weekdays and ¥20,946 (\$175) on weekends and holidays. If you want to sharpen your golf game, the **David Duval Golf Academy** (☎ 0985/38-1182) tailors instruction to individual needs through high-tech, state-of-the-art facilities and top-notch teachers. A 1-day program, including lunch, is ¥36,500 (\$304) for adults and ¥20,000 (\$167) for children. If golf isn't your game, there's also tennis, bowling at a 36-lane alley, scuba diving, jet-skiing, fishing, horse-back riding, and paragliding, as well as jogging, cycling, and in-line skating along an 8km (5-mile) path. For information about these, contact the **Sheraton Grande Ocean Resort** (p. 512).

Unfortunately, the coast along Seagaia is considered unsafe for swimming, but this is more than rectified by Miyazaki's most entertaining attraction, **Ocean Dome** 🌊🌊🌊 (☎ 0985/21-1177), certified by the *Guinness Book of Records* as the world's largest all-weather indoor water park; it has a high-tech retractable Teflon roof (Miyazaki is one of the sunniest places in Japan). You have to see this place to believe it; children will think they've landed in heaven. At this faux tropical paradise, you can lounge on a 140m (466-ft.) long beach (covered by artificial white sand made of marble), ride waves created by the world's largest wave-making system, careen down water slides, eat, and shop. There are also other pools, including a 200m (666-ft.) flowing circular pool and children's pools, as well as a daily show of exhibition surfing. If you don't have your swimsuit, rental suits are available. Needless to say, your kids will spend the whole day here, unless you drag them away kicking and screaming. Admission is ¥2,000 (\$17) for adults, ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for children 4 to 15, and free for children under 4. (Seagaia hotel guests pay ¥1,500/\$13 and ¥800/\$6.65 respectively.) Although kiddie slides are included in the admission, you have to pay ¥500 (\$4.15) extra for a pass to more daring slides, which come with height restrictions (you have to be 110cm/3½ ft. or taller to ride them). Ocean Dome is open daily in summer (Oct–Mar open Wed–Sun) from 10am to 5pm (until 6pm mid-July through Aug) but closes once or twice a month for maintenance, so check before you go. **Note:** Ocean Dome was undergoing management changes as we went to press; check with the Sheraton Ocean Grande (see below) or www.seagaia.co.jp/index_e.htm for updated information.

Access to all the Seagaia attractions and hotels (see “Where to Stay,” below) is by city bus no. 17 or 18 from the west exit of **JR Miyazaki Station** (¥470/\$3.90 for the 30-min. trip) or by direct bus from **Miyazaki Airport** as you exit the arrival lobby (¥800/\$6.65 from the ticket vending machines for the 25-min. trip). Seagaia is so large that a **free shuttle bus** loops to all its facilities, including hotels, every 30 minutes from 7am to 6pm (to 9pm during summer holidays).

AN EASY SIDE TRIP TO THE NICHINAN COAST

South of Miyazaki city is the Nichinan Coast, famous for its exposed and eroded rock sea floor, which is weirdly shaped like rippling waves. Known to the Japanese as Oniwa Sentaku Iwa, or The Ogre's Washboard, it resembles just that.

Here, too, is one of the most famous sights associated with Miyazaki—**Aoshima**, a tiny island less than a mile in circumference and connected to the mainland via a long walkway. Surrounded by a rippled rock (which looks like a washboard) in low tide, it is covered with Betel palms and subtropical plants. It takes only 15 minutes to walk around the island. In its center is a small vermilion shrine, **Aoshima Jinja**, dedicated to first Emperor Jimmu's grandparents. According to legend, the grandfather, a hunter, was a young man when he and his brother, a fisherman, decided to trade chores. The grandfather, fishing here on Aoshima, lost his brother's hook and dove into the depths to retrieve it, only

to end up on a turtle that delivered him to an undersea Dragon's Palace, where he met a fair princess. When he finally found the hook and returned to land, the princess came with him, later bearing him a son. Because of the legend, Aoshima Shrine is considered fortuitous in matchmaking; those wishing for marriage come here to be blessed. The shrine is open daily from dawn until dusk.

You can reach Aoshima in about 30 minutes from Miyazaki Station on the JR Nichinan Line; the fare is ¥360 (\$3) and trains depart about every hour. More frequent are buses departing from Miyazaki Station every 15 to 30 minutes, taking 49 minutes to reach Aoshima and costing ¥670 (\$5.60). Aoshima Island is about a 5-minute walk from Aoshima Station.

Farther south on the Nichinan Coast, about 24km (15 miles) south of Aoshima and 40km (25 miles) south of Miyazaki, is **Udo Shrine** (★★ (☎ 0987/29-1001). Dedicated to the father of Emperor Jimmu, this vermilion-colored shrine is actually located in a cave beside the ocean—an unusual setting for a shrine, but one boasting an exhilarating view. According to legend, it was here that Emperor Jimmu's grandparents came for the birth of their son. As delivery drew near, the soon-to-be mother asked her husband not to watch. Naturally, he couldn't resist, and to his surprise, his wife turned into a dragon. Ashamed, she fled back to sea, leaving breasts on the cave ceiling to feed her newborn son.

Throughout the ages, Udo Shrine has been famous among newlyweds, who come to pray for success and harmony in marriage. In the cave are formations thought to resemble breasts; the water dripping from them is lucky “milk,” considered beneficial for pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing mothers (milk candy is a specialty of the shops near the shrine). If you want to make a wish, purchase some clay pottery pieces at the shrine and try to toss them inside a rope circle that adorns a turtle-shaped rock—if you manage to land one inside the circle, you've got your wish. Women are supposed to throw right-handed, men left-handed.

You can reach Udo Shrine, open 6am to 7pm, by bus from Aoshima or Miyazaki. Get off at Udo Jingu Iriguchi, from which it's a few minutes' walk to the first torii gate followed by a 20-minute walk along the coast to the shrine itself. If you're coming from Miyazaki, take a bus going to Nichinan from platform 16 of the Miyako Kotsu Bus Center; the bus ride takes about 90 minutes and costs ¥1,440 (\$12).

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE

Sheraton Grande Ocean Resort (★★★ The most relaxing and luxurious place to stay in Miyazaki is Seagaia's crowning jewel, the Sheraton Grande Ocean Resort, Kyushu's tallest hotel with 43 floors. It is also the most convenient hotel

Kids A Beach & an Amusement Park

Near Aoshima you'll find **Aoshima Beach**, popular for swimming in July and August; and **Kodomo-no-Kuni** (☎ 0985/65-1111), a small amusement park known also for its year-round flowers. The park's kiddie rides, Ferris wheel, roller coaster, water ride, and paddleboats are good for younger children. It's open daily 9am to 5pm (but closed irregularly for cleaning) with varying extended hours on holidays (to 9pm during summer vacation); admission is ¥800 (\$6.65) for adults and ¥400 (\$3.35) for children. Rides cost extra.

to Ocean Dome, just a 5-minute walk away. Its marbled, elegant lobby stretches 11 stories high, emitting lots of light; in its center is the tropical-themed Pacific Bar with palm trees, a circular aquarium, and live evening music. Rooms, all of which face the sea with magnificent views, are palatial by Japanese standards and are equipped with lots of extras, including vanity/sink areas separate from the bathroom (some standard twins also have separate shower stalls and tubs), both soft and firm pillows, and closets lit by motion detectors. Since you're a bit far from town, it's good to know there are plenty of dining options immediately on hand, including a French restaurant on the 42nd floor with good views, and a Japanese pub specializing in local, country-style cuisine. And in true resort fashion, daily activities run the gamut from cooking and pottery classes to scuba diving. If you're looking for a pampered getaway, this is the place.

Hamayama Yamazaki-cho, Miyazaki City 880-8545. ☎ 800/325-3535 in the U.S. and Canada or 0985/21-1133. Fax 0985/21-1144. www.sheraton.com/grandeocean. ¥22,000 (\$183) single; ¥38,000 – ¥45,000 (\$317–\$375) double; ¥32,000 – ¥42,000 (\$267–\$350) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: From JR Miyazaki Station or Miyazaki Airport; see directions for Seagaia under "What to See & Do," above. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 2 bar/lounges; health club with 24m (79-ft.) indoor lane pool, fitness room, sauna, and Jacuzzi (fee: ¥2,000/\$17); rental bikes (¥500/\$4.15 for 2 hr.); observation room on the 43rd floor (admission: ¥500/\$4.15); mah-jongg salon; children's day-care center; concierge; business center; small shopping arcade; 24-hr. room service; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/video games and pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, safe, bathroom scale, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Aoshima Palm Beach Hotel ★★ *Kids* Located right on Aoshima Beach and surrounded by lovely grounds, this attractive Palm Beach-style hotel was developed by the local government and is a great place for a vacation, especially for families. Hotel guests receive free admission to Kodomo-no-Kuni, an amusement park for children located right beside the hotel (which has nightly fireworks displays during summer vacation). TVs offer pay video movies, including English-language films the whole family can watch. All Western-style rooms and most of the 44 Japanese-style rooms (which can sleep up to five persons) have huge windows facing the sea and views of Aoshima Island. During summer vacation (mid-July and Aug), reserve at least 2 months in advance.

1-16-1 Aoshima, Miyazaki 889-2162. ☎ 0985/65-2929. Fax 0985/65-2655. 214 units. ¥9,200 – ¥12,800 (\$77–\$107) per person. Extra charges during Golden Week (Apr 29–May 5) and New Year's. Rates include breakfast and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Train: JR Nichinan Line to Kodomo-no-Kuni Station (3 min.). Bus: Miyazaki Kotsu from Miyazaki Station to Kodomo-no-Kuni-hoteru-mae (2 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Chinese, Japanese/Western); coffee shop; lounge; snack bar (handy for beachgoers); hot-spring baths fed by saltwater with ocean views; health club with exercise room, indoor lap pool, children's pool, and sauna (¥1,500/\$13); Kodomo-no-Kuni amusement park (free admission for hotel guests; rides cost extra); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies; fridge; hot-water pot with tea; hair dryer; safe; washlet toilet.

Miyazaki Kanko Hotel The Miyazaki Kanko Hotel is the best of a string of hotels along the Oyodo River, which has been developed into a small waterfront park not far from Miyazaki Station. It consists of a newer east wing with higher-priced rooms, which are larger than those in an older west wing with fewer amenities. Rooms face either the river or town (favored for its night view) for the same price. Rooms are equipped with minibars or empty fridges. A plus are the hot-spring baths; the hot springs were excavated from deep below the ground after much effort.

1-1-1 Matsuyama, Miyazaki City 880-8512. ☎ 0985/27-1212. Fax 0985/25-8748. 375 units. ¥7,000 – ¥16,000 (\$58–\$133) single; ¥14,000 – ¥21,000 (\$117–\$175) double; ¥16,000 – ¥27,000 (\$133–\$225) twin.

AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Miyazaki (a 15-min. walk from Miyazaki Station or a 5-min. taxi ride); turn left from Miyazaki Station's west exit, walk south on Rte. (Kendo) 341 to the Oyodo River, and turn right. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 2 bars; 2 lounges; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; Jacuzzi; sauna; game arcade; shopping arcade; salon; room service (9pm–midnight); same-day laundry/dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

Cottage Himuka *Kids* Located in the Seagaia resort area, Cottage Himuka is geared toward families, groups, and longer stays with clean, bright, functional apartments complete with kitchenettes (hot plate, microwave, refrigerator, cookware); four single beds; a sofa and two chairs; a balcony; and separate sink, toilet, and tub areas. Larger, more expensive apartments sleep up to eight persons. Apartments occupy free-standing “cottages” on spacious grounds grouped around a restaurant (serving a breakfast buffet, lunch, and dinner), a convenience store, and an outdoor pool open July to mid-September. All the Seagaia facilities are at hand.

Hamayama, Yamazaki-cho, Miyazaki City 880-8545. ☎ **800/325-3535** in the U.S. and Canada or 0985/21-1355. Fax 0985/21-1356. <http://pc4.seagaia-miyazaki-b3-unet.ocn.ne.jp/english/pages/index004.html>. 72 units. ¥20,000 (\$167) for up to 4 persons; ¥40,000 (\$333) for up to 8 persons. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: From JR Miyazaki Station or Miyazaki Airport; see directions for Seagaia in “What to See & Do,” above. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western/Japanese); outdoor swimming pool (free for hotel guests); rental bikes (¥500/\$4.15 for 2 hr.); convenience store. *In room:* A/C, TV, kitchenette, hair dryer.

Hotel Kensington The main reason most people come to Miyazaki is to relax at accommodations at Seagaia or Aoshima, but if you can't afford those prices (or didn't book soon enough), this is a good budget choice in the city center. Opened in 1994 and located on Tachibana-dori Avenue near department stores and shopping, this inexpensive establishment resembles a business hotel in its simplicity but is also popular with young Japanese women because of its location and rates. Despite its name, the only hints of English are a knight of armor guarding the drawing-room-style lobby and the afternoon tea served in the Café London. Rooms are tiny; ask for a room that doesn't face another building. The cheapest doubles have semi-double-size beds, which are comfortable for one but cramped for two. One floor has rooms equipped with high-speed dataports.

3-4-4 Tachibana-dori-higashi, Miyazaki City 880-0805. ☎ **0985/20-5500**. Fax 0985/32-7700. www.face.ne.jp/kensington. ¥6,300 – ¥7,700 (\$53–\$62) single; ¥7,800 – ¥10,000 (\$65–\$83) double; ¥10,700 (\$89) twin. Discounts on Sun and holidays. AE, MC, V. A 10-min. walk from Miyazaki Station's west exit. Walk straight ahead down Takachiho-dori to Tachibana-dori and turn left; the hotel will be on your left. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar (except in singles which have empty fridges), hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Miyazaki's subtropical climate is conducive to the growth of a number of vegetables and fruits, including sweet pumpkins, oranges, cucumbers, green peppers, shiitake mushrooms, and chestnuts. In summer, a popular dish is *Hiyajiru*, a rice dish topped with soup made from fish, miso bean paste, tofu, cucumbers, and other ingredients. Also popular is *shochu*, an alcoholic drink made from sweet potatoes, buckwheat, or corn.

②②① **Gyosantei** LOCAL SPECIALTIES Although the stairway leading up doesn't seem to promise much, this is actually an attractive restaurant with wooden floors, both table and tatami seating, and waitresses dressed in country-style clothing. For local food, try the *Himukazen* (facing the sun) course, which changes according to what's in season and what the cook decides to create; in summer, it might include the chef's own version of Hiyajiru such as a sesame-seed- and

mint-flavored soup poured over rice. There's no English-language menu, but dining here is a culinary surprise; even your chopstick holder may be unusual, consisting of nothing more than a small green pepper.

Airline Hotel East Building, 2nd floor, 3–10–19 Tachibana-dori-nishi. ☎ 0985/32-3737. Set lunch ¥1,500 – ¥3,000 (\$13–\$25); set dinner ¥4,000 – ¥7,000 (\$33–\$58). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–1:30pm and 5:30–9pm (last order). Station: Miyazaki (10 min.). From the station's west exit, walk straight ahead down Takachiho-dori and cross Tachibana-dori; it's immediately on your left down the small alley.

Restaurant Paris 5 FRENCH Located to the right of the main entrance to Miyazaki Shrine and convenient if you've been visiting the many sights in the area, this delightful restaurant looks imported directly from sunny southern France. It beckons with a balcony overflowing with flowers and plants and a tall and airy dining room. Although its seasonal menu is written in Japanese, ordering is easy since only set meals—most featuring seafood and Miyazaki beef—are available for both lunch and dinner. (This is the only French restaurant in Miyazaki authorized to serve Miyazaki beef, but don't ask me why authorization is necessary.) Its cheerful balcony is open year-round (weather permitting). Call beforehand, however, because its close proximity to Miyazaki Shrine makes it a popular venue for wedding receptions.

1–8–8 Jingu-Higashi. ☎ 0985/29-8039. Set lunch ¥1,800 – ¥4,500 (\$15–\$38); set dinner ¥3,800 – ¥8,800 (\$32–\$73). AE, MC, V (accepted only at dinner). Wed–Mon 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–9:30pm. Bus: From Tachibana-dori Ave. or Miyako Kotsu Bus Center to Miyazaki Jingu (1 min.).

4 Kagoshima ★

1,483km (927 miles) SW of Tokyo; 315km (197 miles) S of Fukuoka; 197km (123 miles) S of Kumamoto; 343km (214 miles) SW of Beppu

With a population of more than half a million and capital of Kagoshima Prefecture, Kagoshima is a city of palm trees, flowering trees and bushes, wide avenues, and people who are like the weather—warm, mild-tempered, and easygoing. The city spreads along Kinko Bay and boasts one of the most unusual bay vistas in the world—Sakurajima, an active volcano, rising from the waters. During summer vacation (July 21–Aug), there are nightly fireworks displays over the bay. Kagoshima is also home to Senganen Garden, one of my favorite gardens in Japan.

Because of its relative isolation at the southern tip of Japan, far away from the capitals of Kyoto and Tokyo, Kagoshima has developed an independent spirit through the centuries that has fostered a number of great men and accomplishments. Foremost is the Shimazu clan, a remarkable family that for 29 generations (almost 700 years) ruled over Kagoshima and its vicinity before the Meiji Restoration in 1868. Much of Japan's early contact with the outside world was via Kagoshima, first with China and then with the Western world. Japan's first contact with Christianity occurred in Kagoshima when St. Francis Xavier landed here in 1549; although he stayed only 10 months, he converted more than 600 Japanese to Christianity. Kagoshima is also where firearms were introduced to Japan.

By the mid-19th century, as the Tokugawa shogunate began losing strength and the confidence of the people, the Shimazu family was already looking toward the future and the modernization of Japan. In the mid-1850s, the Shimazus built the first Western-style factory in the country, employing 200 men to make cannons, glass, ceramics, land mines, ships, and farming tools. In 1865, while Japan's doors were still officially closed to the outside world and all contact with foreigners was forbidden, the Shimazus smuggled 19 young men to Britain so they could learn foreign languages and technology. After these men

returned to Japan, they became a driving force in the Meiji Restoration and Japan's modernization.

Another historical figure who played a major role during the Meiji Restoration was Saigo Takamori, who was born in Kagoshima Prefecture. A philosopher, scholar, educator, and poet, he helped restore Emperor Meiji to power, but because he was also a samurai, he subsequently became disillusioned when the ancient rights of the samurai class were rescinded and the wearing of swords was forbidden. He led a force of samurai against the government in what is called the Seinan Rebellion but was defeated. He then withdrew to Shiroyama in Kagoshima, where he committed suicide in 1877. Today, Saigo has many fans among the Japanese, who still visit the cave on Shiroyama Hill where he committed suicide.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane You can reach Kagoshima from Tokyo (flight time: 1 hr. 40 min.), Nagoya (flight time: 1 hr. 20 min.), and Osaka (flight time: 1 hr. 5 min.) on JAL and ANA; ANA also flies direct to Kagoshima from Sapporo (flight time: 2 hr. 35 min.) and Hiroshima (flight time: 55 min.). The fare from Tokyo is ¥33,000 (\$275) one-way.

Downtown Kagoshima is linked to the airport by **limousine bus**, which departs every 10 minutes, takes 1 hour to reach Nishi Kagoshima Station, and costs ¥1,200 (\$10).

By JR Train Travel time is approximately 10½ hours from Tokyo, 8 hours from Osaka, and 4 hours from Fukuoka. Tickets from Tokyo cost ¥25,100 (\$209) for an unreserved seat. All trains passing through Kagoshima make two stops, at both Kagoshima Station and Nishi Kagoshima Station; be sure to check which station your hotel is closest to so you know where to get off the train.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before departing Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai international airports, stop by the Tourist Information Center to pick up the leaflet called “Kagoshima and Vicinity,” which includes information on Ibusuki and Chiran.

In Kagoshima, there are Tourist Information Centers at both **Nishi Kagoshima Station** (☎ 099/253-2500; open daily 8:30am–6pm) and **Kagoshima Station** (☎ 099/222-2500; open daily 8:30am–5pm), as well as at the airport (☎ 0995/58-2115). They have good maps in English and a very handy booklet with suggested walking tours of the city.

The **Kagoshima Prefectural Tourist Office** is located in the Sangyo Kaikan Building, 9–1 Meizan-cho (☎ 099/223-5771; open Mon–Fri 8:30am–5:15pm), where you can obtain information on the city as well as the prefecture, including Ibusuki and Chiran (ask for the booklet *Kagoshima Travel Guide*). To find the office, take the streetcar to the Asahi-Dori stop and then walk southeast (toward the bay); the Sangyo Kaikan Building is on your left in the second block. You can find more information on Kagoshima by logging onto www.city.kagoshima.jp/WebGuide/kago_kanko.nsf.

INTERNET ACCESS The **Kagoshima Prefecture International Exchange Association** (14–50 Yamashita-cho; ☎ 099/221-6620), conveniently located a 5-minute walk from either Kagoshima Station or Sakurajima Pier, offers 30 minutes of free Internet access Tuesday to Sunday from 9am to 5pm.

MAIL An international post office, where you can send letters and packages and obtain cash through ATMs, is located at Nishi Kagoshima Station.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND The downtown section of Kagoshima is the area between Nishi Kagoshima and Kagoshima stations, with **Tenmonkan-Dori** (a covered shopping arcade) serving as the heart of the city. You can walk from one station to the other in less than 40 minutes, but there's also a streetcar connecting the two, running along an unnamed street that locals have nicknamed Densha Dori (tram street).

Kagoshima is served by two **streetcar lines** (fare: ¥160/\$1.35), as well as two types of **buses**—City View buses and Kagoshima City buses. The **Kagoshima City buses** are regular buses used as commuter transportation by the people living here, while the **City View buses** are geared toward visiting tourists. Running every 30 minutes from 9:30am to 5pm daily (9am–5:30pm daily mid-July to Aug), the City View buses look like old-time streetcars, have English announcements, and travel a 14km (9-mile) circuit through the city, beginning at Nishi Kagoshima Station (with departures on the hour and half-hour). They stop at all tourist sights, including Senganen, Sakurajima Ferry Terminal and Kagoshima Aquarium, and Tenmonkan covered shopping arcade. The fare is ¥180 (\$1.50), half fare for children, and you pay when you get off.

If you think you'll be doing a lot of traveling by streetcar and bus (including City View buses), invest in a 1-day pass for ¥600 (\$5), half fare for children, allowing unlimited travel on Kagoshima's two streetcar lines and on City View and Kagoshima City buses. Passes can be purchased at the tourist offices in Kagoshima Station and Nishi Kagoshima Station and aboard buses and streetcars.

GUIDED TOURS Since city tours are offered only in Japanese, more useful, perhaps, are guided tours that take you to places a bit more difficult to reach on your own. Tours of Sakurajima lasting 1½ hours will take you halfway up the volcano to a lookout observatory, with departures from the ferry pier on Sakurajima twice daily (see “What to See & Do,” below, for more information). In addition, a 9-hour guided tour departs Nishi Kagoshima Station at 8:50am, goes to Ibusuki (the next city covered in this chapter), and then visits a shochu factory, Mount Kaimon, Lake Ikeda, Chiran with its samurai houses and Peace Museum (see “What to See & Do,” below), and other sights before returning to Nishi Kagoshima Station. The cost of this tour is ¥4,550 (\$38) for adults and ¥2,360 (\$20) for children (you can also join the tour in Ibusuki; see the next section for more information). Contact the **Kagoshima Kotsu Bus Company** at ☎ 099/259-2888 for information and bookings.

Finally, July 21 through August, boat cruises of Kinko Bay are offered every evening from 7 to 9pm (except for a few days during Obon in mid-Aug), the highlight of which are fireworks over the water. Boats depart from the Kagoshima side of the Sakurajima Ferry Terminal and charge ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults, half fare for children. Call ☎ 099/293-2525 for more information.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

MOUNT SAKURAJIMA ★ With ties to Naples, Italy, as its sister city, Kagoshima bills itself the “Naples of the Orient.” That's perhaps stretching things a bit, but Kagoshima is balmy most of the year and even has its own Mount Vesuvius—Mount Sakurajima, an active volcano across Kinko Bay that has erupted 30 times through recorded history and continues to puff steam into the sky and occasionally cover the city with fine soot and ash. In 1914, Sakurajima had a whopper of an eruption and belched up three billion tons of lava.

When the eruption was over, the townspeople were surprised to discover that the flow was so great it had blocked the 500m (1,666-ft.) wide channel separating the volcano from a neighboring peninsula—Sakurajima, which had once been an island, was now part of the mainland.

Magnificent from far away and impressive if you're near the top, Sakurajima can be visited by **ferry**, which departs from the Sakurajima Ferry Terminal. The terminal is about a 15-minute walk from Kagoshima Station, an 8-minute walk from the Shiyakusho-mae streetcar stop, or a 2-minute walk from the Kagoshima Aquarium-mae/Sakurajima-sanbashi City View bus stop. Ferries run 24 hours, departing every 15 minutes during the day and about once an hour through the night. The 15-minute trip to Sakurajima costs ¥150 (\$1.25) for adults, ¥80 (65¢) for children.

A fun thing to do on Sakurajima is visit **Furusato Onsen** ♨️, at the Furusato Kanko Hotel (☎ 099/221-3111), with open-air hot-spring baths set amid lava rocks right beside the sea. It also has an outdoor seawater swimming pool with a sunning terrace, an indoor 25m (82-ft.) lap pool heated with hot-spring water, and indoor hot-spring baths with windows overlooking the bay. You wear your swimsuit in the pools but should put a *yukata* (cotton kimono) over your swimsuit when using the outdoor bath (a handout in English provides guidelines). It's open every day except Thursday from 6am to 10pm (you must enter by 8pm); note that on Monday the outdoor bath is closed until 2:30pm, and the indoor hot-spring bath and pool are closed on Tuesday. Admission is ¥1,050 (\$8.75) including yukata; bring your own towel or buy one for another ¥210 (\$1.75). You can reach Furusato Onsen by taking the **free Furusato Kanko Hotel shuttle bus** departing from the Sakurajima Ferry Terminal every 30 minutes from 8:45am to 5pm (no service 12:20–2:20pm). Otherwise, take the **Kagoshima Kotsu Bus** that departs once an hour from the ferry terminal, costing ¥290 (\$2.40) for the 15-minute trip. For more information on the Furusato Kanko Hotel, see “Where to Stay,” below.

Guided Tours of Sakurajima There are **walking paths** through lava fields close to Sakurajima's ferry pier, but because Sakurajima is sparsely populated with only limited public transportation, you might want to join a tour that visits lava fields and travels to the Yunohira lookout point halfway up the volcano. Buses depart twice daily at 9:30am and 1:30pm from the ferry dock on Sakurajima; the price of the tour, which lasts 3 hours, is ¥1,700 (\$14) for adults and half price for children. An English-language notebook describes every stop. Call ☎ 099/293-2525 for more information.

SENGANEN GARDEN 🌳🌳🌳 Whereas Sakurajima, rising dramatically out of the bay, is Kagoshima's best-known landmark, **Senganen**, 9700–1 Yoshino-cho (☎ 099/247-1551), is its most widely visited attraction. The grounds of a countryside villa, it's a garden laid out more than 300 years ago by the Shimazu clan, incorporating Sakurajima and Kinko Bay into its design scheme in a principle known as borrowed landscape. There's a lovely grove of bamboo, a waterfall located a 30-minute walk up a nature trail with good views over the bay, and the requisite pond, but my favorite is a particularly idyllic spot where the 21st lord of the Shimazu family held famous poem-composing garden parties. Guests seated themselves on stones beside a gently meandering rivulet and were requested to have completed a poem by the time a cup filled with sake came drifting by on the tiny brook. Ah, those were the days! Today it remains Japan's only garden with its original poem-composing garden (called Kyokusui) still intact.

Fun Fact Mount Sakurajima's Produce

Mount Sakurajima's rich soil grows the world's largest radishes, averaging about 17 kilograms (37 lb.) but sometimes weighing in at as much as 36 kilograms (80 lb.), and the world's smallest oranges, only 3cm (1¼ in.) in diameter.

The good life is also apparent in **Goten**, which was built as a villa by the Shimazu clan about 350 years ago and became the family's main residence when the Meiji Restoration made feudal lords obsolete. Now only one-third its original size, Goten can be viewed by joining a tour conducted every 20 minutes and given only in Japanese (but with an information sheet in English). You'll see eight of the villa's 25 rooms, including a bedroom, a bathroom, a dressing room, and reception rooms; throughout are furnishings and artifacts that once belonged to the Shimazu clan. Green tea and a sweet are included with the tour.

A must after visiting the garden, and included in the admission price to Senganen, is the **Shoko Shuseikan Museum**, located next to the garden. Built in the mid-1850s as Japan's first industrial factory, it houses items relating to the almost 700-year history of the Shimazu clan, including family heirlooms ranging from lacquerware to tea-ceremony objects, palanquins used to carry Shimazu lords back and forth to Edo (present-day Tokyo; the trip from Kagoshima took 40–60 days), everyday items used by the family, and photographs. The museum shop is also quite good. In all, you'll probably spend at least 2 hours seeing everything.

Senganen and the Shoko Shuseikan Museum are open daily from 8:30am to 5:30pm (to 5:20pm in winter); Goten is open daily from 9am to 4:40pm. Admission to Senganen and Shoko Shuseikan Museum is ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults and ¥500 (\$4.15) for children. Tours of Goten are an extra ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults and ¥250 (\$2.10) for children.

Just southwest of Shuseikan Museum are a few buildings registered as Tangible Cultural Properties, one of which contains the Iso Craft Shop. Behind it is a factory where you can observe Satsuma cut glass being made free of charge (closed Mon). Here also is the Iso Kuwahara-kan, today a restaurant (see "Where to Dine," later in this chapter) but once the Serigano Gold Mine Office.

To reach Senganen, which is east of Kagoshima Station and a bit out of the city, take the City View bus to the Senganen-mae bus stop outside its front gate.

MORE TO SEE & DO

KAGOSHIMA CITY AQUARIUM  This aquarium, beside the Sakurajima Ferry Terminal on the Kagoshima side at 3–1 Honko-Shinmachi (☎ 099/226-2233; open daily 9:30am–6pm; you must enter by 5pm), concentrates on sea life from waters surrounding Kagoshima Prefecture. The largest tank is home to stingrays, bluefin tuna, Japanese anchovy, and other creatures from the Kurushio (Black Current), which flows from the East China Sea past Kagoshima to the Pacific Ocean. Another tank contains squid, octopuses, the Japanese giant crab (the world's largest crab), and fish that inhabit the Kagoshima seas. Other highlights include the world's only display of tube worms, a 3-D movie of the surrounding seas, and the world's largest eel (from Lake Ikeda). Dolphins, which have access to open waters, are used only for educational shows (conducted in Japanese only). Expect to spend at least an hour here, more if you have kids.

Admission is ¥1,500 (\$13) for adults, ¥750 (\$6.25) for junior-high and high-school students, and ¥350 (\$2.90) for children. To reach it, take the City View bus to the Kagoshima Aquarium-mae/Sakurajima-sanbashi bus stop.

MUSEUMS For an overview of Kagoshima Prefecture, including its history and folklore, visit the **Kagoshima Prefectural Museum of Culture** (Reimeikan), 5-1 Shiroyama-cho (☎ 099/222-5100; open Tues–Sun 9am–5pm). It was built on the former site of Tsurumaru Castle, of which only the stone ramparts and moat remain. Upon entering the museum, you'll walk over a glass floor above a map of Kagoshima Prefecture. The museum then traces the history of the people of Kagoshima over the last 40,000 years, including the rise of the Shimazu clan in the 11th century and Kagoshima's pre-eminence as a pottery center after Korean potters were brought here in the 1500s. There are models of an 18th-century samurai settlement, Tsurumaru Castle and, best of all, Tenmonkan-Dori as it might have looked 70 years ago. The second floor is devoted to folklore with bambooware, festival objects, and personal items that once belonged to the Shimazu clan. The third floor has a hands-on learning room for children with old-fashioned toys, samurai outfits that can be tried on, and other amusements. Don't miss the 140-year-old thatched-roof farmer's house and pond located outside. A visit to this museum will take about an hour. Admission is ¥260 (\$2.15) for adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) for college and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children. To reach it, take the City View bus to the Satsuma Gishihimae stop in front of the museum. Or take the streetcar to Shiyakusho-mae stop; walking in the direction of Kagoshima Station, take the first left and walk 4 minutes straight to the museum.

Only a few minutes' walk away from the Reimeikan is the **City Art Museum (Kagoshima Shiritsu Bijitsukan)**, 4-36 Shiroyama-cho (☎ 099/224-3400; open Tues–Sun 9:30am–6pm), which has a collection of Western-style works by artists from Kagoshima Prefecture. Look for the portrait of Saigo Takamori, painted by Masayoshi Tokonomi, to the left upon entering the permanent gallery. A small selection of paintings by Western artists is also displayed, as well as decorative art including the famous Satsuma pottery and cut glass. You can see everything in less than an hour. Admission is ¥200 (\$1.65) for adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) for college and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children. To reach the museum, take the City View bus to Saigodouzou-mae; the museum is a minute's walk away to the right of the statue of Saigo. Or take the streetcar to Asahi-dori and take the street beside the Minami-Nippon bank; it's a 5-minute walk ahead.

Although it's not as conveniently located, the **Nagashima Museum** ★★, 3-42-18 Take (☎ 099/250-5400; open daily 9am–5pm), is a very worthwhile private museum on a hill high atop the city with great views of Sakurajima and Kagoshima. While its focus is mostly works by Kagoshima artists like Seiki Kuroda, it also contains some works by well-known Western artists, including Picasso, Braque, Kandinsky, Renoir, and Chagall, as well as pottery from South America. But most impressive, in my opinion, is an outstanding collection of mainly 19th-century white Satsuma pottery, including many pieces that were originally imported to London, Paris, and New York, and the more utilitarian 17th- to 20th-century black Satsuma pottery. An hour is enough time to see everything, but try to time your visit during lunch so you can eat in the museum's French restaurant **Camellia** (open 11am–3pm with set meals ranging ¥2,000–¥3,000/\$17–\$25), which has great views over the city. Admission to

the museum is ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults, ¥800 (\$6.65) for college and high-school students, and ¥400 (\$3.35) for children. You'll have to take a taxi to get here; it's about a 10-minute ride from Nishi Kagoshima Station.

A SIDE TRIP TO THE GARDENS OF CHIRAN

If you have an extra morning or afternoon, I suggest taking an excursion to **Chiran** (✳✳), a small village 31km (19 miles) south of Kagoshima. Surrounded by wooded hills and rows of neatly cultivated tea plantations, it's one of the 102 castle towns that once bordered the Shimazu kingdom during the Edo Period. Although the castle is no longer standing, seven old gardens and samurai houses have been carefully preserved.

Apparently, the village headman of Chiran had the opportunity to travel with his lord Shimazu in the mid-1700s to Kyoto and Edo, taking with him some of his local samurai as retainers. The headman and his retainers were so impressed with the sophisticated culture of Kyoto and Edo that they invited gardeners to Chiran to construct a series of modestly sized gardens on the samurai estates surrounding the castle.

Some of these gardens remain and are located on a delightful road nicknamed **Samurai Lane**, which is lined with moss-covered stone walls and hedges. Since descendants of the samurai are still living in the houses, only the gardens are open to the public. There are two types of gardens represented: One, belonging to the Mori family, is of the miniature artificial-hill style, in which a central pond symbolizes the sea, and rocks represent the mountains; the others are "dry" gardens, in which the sea is symbolized not by water but by white sand that is raked to give it the effect of rippling water. The gardens are masterful demonstrations of the borrowed landscape technique, in which surrounding mountains and scenery are incorporated into the general garden design. Although the gardens are small, they are exquisite and charming. Notice, for example, how the tops of hedges are cut to resemble rolling hills, blending with the shapes of mountains in the background. Entrance is through imposing gates from the era.

The seven gardens open to the public are indicated by a white marker in front of each entry gate. All seven can be visited for ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for children. Pay the entry fee for all seven at the first garden you visit; you'll be given a pamphlet containing a map and a description of the gardens in English. They're open daily from 9am to 5pm and can be viewed in about 1½ hours. For more information on the samurai gardens, call ☎ 0993/83-2511.

Also in Chiran is the **Peace Museum (Heiwa Kaikan; ☎ 0993/83-2525; open daily 9am–5pm)**, dedicated to the kamikaze pilots who trained here for World War II suicide missions, steering bomb-laden planes into Allied warships and other targets. Although there isn't much in English and you can walk through the place in about 30 minutes, an English-language audio guide is available for ¥100 (85¢) if you want to learn more. Admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for children.

Chiran can be reached in about 1 hour and 20 minutes by taking a bus headed for Makurazaki (there's no bus number) from Yamakataya Bus Station in front of the Asahi-Dori streetcar stop in downtown Kagoshima. There are 10 buses a day, including departures at 9, 9:50, and 11:10am; the ride costs ¥860 (\$7.15). Although it's a long ride, the trip through the countryside with its tea plantations and wooded hills is nice. In Chiran, get off at Buke-Yashiki to see the samurai gardens. From there, you'll have to take a taxi to visit the Peace Museum.

An alternative to going on your own is to join a 9-hour **guided tour** from Nishi Kagoshima Station that includes a stop at the samurai gardens in Chiran. See “Guided Tours” under “Essentials,” above, for more information.

SHOPPING

Local Kagoshima products include *oshima tsumugi*, beautiful silk made into such items as clothing, handbags, and wallets; *shochu*, an alcoholic drink made from such ingredients as sweet potatoes and drunk either on the rocks or mixed with boiling water; furniture, statues, and chests made from **yaku cedar**; and **Satsuma pottery**—probably Kagoshima’s most famous product. It has been produced in the Kagoshima area for more than 380 years. Satsuma pottery comes in two styles: black and white. White Satsuma pottery is more elegant and was used by former lords; the black pottery was used by the townspeople in everyday life.

A good place to shop for local items is the **Display Hall of Kagoshima Products**, downtown in the Sangyo Kaikan Building (the same building housing the Kagoshima Prefectural Tourist Office) at 9–1 Meizan-cho (☎ 099/225-6120; open daily 9am–5pm, closed the 1st and 3rd Sun of the month). This one-room shop offers tinware, handmade knives, Satsuma pottery, glassware, oshima tsumugi, yaku cedar, shochu, and other locally made items. To reach it, take the streetcar to the Asahi-Dori stop, from which the shop is a 1-minute walk away toward the bay.

The most famous cake of Kagoshima (the one all Japanese tourists must buy before returning home) is *karukan*, a delicious spongy white cake made from rice, with Chinese and Korean origins. The most famous maker of karukan today is (221) **Akashiya**, 4–16 Kinseicho (☎ 099/226-0431; open daily 9am–8pm), which began selling the cakes 140 years ago. It has the solemnity of a first-rate jewelry store and is just as refined. It’s located behind the Yamakataya department store, a 1-minute walk from the Asahi-Dori streetcar stop. Although cakes are now available made from beans and other ingredients, old-timers insist that only the plain white ones are the real thing. A small round one, good for a snack, costs ¥140 (\$1.15), while a 700-gram (1½-lb.) cake goes for ¥1,800 (\$15).

WHERE TO STAY EXPENSIVE

(222) **Shigetomiso** ★★ One of Kagoshima’s most famous and beautiful ryokan—and once a villa of the ruling Shimazu clan—is spread along a gentle slope in a storybook setting with views of the bay and Sakurajima. Its oldest rooms, which are no longer used as guest rooms but can be booked for lunch, date from the 1820s and exude history. One room, for example, is said to have belonged to the lord’s mistress; you can see a wooden pillar marred by tiny holes—apparently made by the mistress as she stabbed it with her hairpin out of frustration with the lord’s too-infrequent visits. There’s a closet where the clan could hide during attack, and the ceiling of one hallway was constructed deliberately low to thwart downward blows of enemy swords. In more recent history, a sequence in the James Bond movie *You Only Live Twice* was filmed in one of the ryokan’s rooms. In short, the ryokan is a museum in itself and contains antiques that once belonged to the Shimazu family. Unfortunately, guest rooms, which are located in a new wing, do not have as much character as the Edo-Era ones, but they are elegantly simple, peaceful, and tranquil. Since they are all the same price, ask for one of the two facing the garden. Room prices reflect the seasons, with the

highest price charged during Golden Week and New Year's. Note that reservations are not accepted by fax.

31-7 Shimizu-cho, Kagoshima 892-0802. ☎ 099/247-3155. Fax 099/247-0960. info@shigetomsiou.jp. 8 units. ¥25,000 – ¥40,000 (\$208–\$333) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 5 min. from Kagoshima Station, in the direction of Senganen. **Amenities:** Outdoor restaurant (Japanese barbecue); kaiseki lunch served in private rooms (reservations required; lunch from ¥3,000/\$25, dinner from ¥5,000/\$42); in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Shiroyama Kanko Hotel ★★ Kagoshima's foremost hotel (which also goes by the name of Castle Park Hotel) sits 106m (353 ft.) high atop the wood-covered Shiroyama Hill and commands a great view of the city below and Sakurajima across the bay. It also has a nice garden. Opened a quarter of a century ago but updated, it offers pleasant and comfortable rooms, the most recommended of which face the volcano and city with the best views in town. Singles (which all face the mountains) and twins have semi-double beds, while doubles have queen-size beds. The hotel's main drawback is its isolated location away from the city center. Taxis may add to the price of staying here, but it's a good respite from city life, and restaurants offer views of the peaceful garden or sweeping panoramas of the city. A free English-language movie is shown nightly on an enormous screen in one of the hotel's function rooms, and the hot-spring baths with views are another plus.

41-1 Shinshoin-cho, Kagoshima 890-8586. ☎ 099/224-2211. Fax 099/224-2222. www.shiroyama-g.co.jp. 365 units. ¥10,000 (\$83) single; ¥19,000 – ¥25,000 (\$158–\$208) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 15 min. from either station. Bus: City View from Nishi Kagoshima Station to Shiroyama (1 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Western, 2 Japanese, Chinese); 2 lounges; outdoor/indoor hot-spring baths; sauna; game center; travel agency; large souvenir shop selling locally made crafts; salon; room service (10pm–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; bakery; movie theatre. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, trouser press.

MODERATE

②23 **Furusato Kanko Hotel** ★ *Finds* Although this ryokan on Sakurajima is inconvenient for sightseeing, it's great for relaxation. It boasts open-air hot-spring baths set amid rocks right beside the sea. It also has an outdoor, seawater swimming pool with a sunning terrace, an indoor 25m (82-ft.) lap pool heated with hot springs, and indoor hot-spring baths overlooking the sea (see "What to See & Do," earlier in this chapter, for more information). Guests are charged a one-time usage fee of ¥210 (\$1.75). Afterward, retire to the shrinelike Meditation Room for spiritual cleansing as well. Rooms are all Japanese-style with balconies overlooking the bay. Breakfast features *kamameshi* (rice casseroles) made with hot-spring water; dinner consists mainly of seafood, *tonkotsu* (boiled pork), and other local specialties. Japanese movies are shown on a large video screen in the lobby. This place is a great getaway.

1076 Furusato-cho, Kagoshima 891-1592. ☎ 099/221-3111. Fax 099/221-2345. 40 units. ¥13,000 (\$108) per person weekdays; ¥15,000 (\$125) per person weekends and the night before holidays; ¥18,000 (\$150) per person Golden Week and New Year's. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, MC, V. From Kagoshima Station, a 5-min. walk to Sakurajima Ferry Terminal, then a 15-min. ferry ride to Sakurajima, then a free Furusato Kanko Hotel shuttle bus departing from ferry terminal every 30 min., 8:45am–8pm (no service 12:20–2:20pm), or a local bus departing hourly from the ferry terminal to Furusato Onsen. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese, serving lunch only); indoor pool; great indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths and swimming pools; video games; in-room massage; meditation room. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

Kagoshima Tokyu Hotel *Kids* This first-rate medium-priced hotel is in a newer area of Kagoshima, smack-dab on the waterfront with a good view of the volcano, even from its lobby lounge. Its twins and doubles face the water with

balconies—great for watching the sun rise over Sakurajima. Note that singles, however, all face inland. Some rooms have dedicated dataports. Outdoor pools, including a children's pool, are open year-round free to hotel guests, making this a good bet for families. In summer, take advantage of the outdoor, seaside beer terrace.

22–1 Kamoike Shinmachi, Kagoshima 890-0064. ☎ 099/257-2411. Fax 099/257-6083. www.tokyuhotels.co.jp. 206 units. ¥7,500 – ¥10,000 (\$63–\$83) single; ¥18,000 (\$150) double; ¥15,000 – ¥23,000 (\$125–\$192) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: 11 from Nishi Kagoshima Station to the last stop (2 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Western, steaks); bar; summer beer garden; outdoor pool; children's pool; outdoor hot-spring bath; Jacuzzi; concierge; shopping arcade; salon; room service (noon–9pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Sun Royal Hotel This hotel is also located in a newer area of Kagoshima, a waterfront neighborhood of modern buildings and wide avenues. It's a bit far from the center, but city buses departing from Nishi Kagoshima reach the hotel in 20 minutes. Rooms have just the basics; though those facing the sea with a small balcony are the best, while the cheapest rooms face inland. There's a great *onsen* (hot-spring bath) with a sauna on the 13th floor, separated for men and women and free to hotel guests, where you can look out over Mount Sakurajima as you bathe. There's also a relaxation room with a choice of therapies that promise everything from relaxation to enhanced creativity, administered after you crawl into a capsule with music, sounds, aromas, vibrations, changing temperatures, and glasses emitting flashing lights (fee: ¥1,200/\$10). Restaurants include the Phoenix Sky Lounge on the 13th floor serving Western food and boasting a view of the sea.

1–8–10 Yojiro, Kagoshima 890-8581. ☎ 099/253-2020. Fax 099/255-0186. www.sunroyal.co.jp. 262 units. ¥6,000 – ¥8,500 (\$50–\$71) single; ¥18,000 (\$150) double; ¥15,000 – ¥24,000 (\$125–\$200) twin. AE, MC, V. Bus: 27 from Nishi Kagoshima Station to Shimin-Bunko Hall-Kitaguchi (1 min.). **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, Western, coffee shop); bar; indoor hot-spring bath; sauna; relaxation room; salon; room service (5:30–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

Gasthof Hotel ★ *Kids* After traveling to Europe, the owner of this inexpensive, 30-year-old hotel decided to re-create the coziness of a German bed-and-breakfast with a cafe in the lobby and rooms that vary in decor, furniture, and bedspreads, including four-poster beds in some. Although it falls short, the Gasthof has a lot more character than a regular business hotel. The location is convenient, guests can use the Internet for free at a lobby desk, and the rooms and baths have been recently redone. It's also a good place for families—the owners are very nice to children. If you are lucky, the owner may even take you on a personal tour of his private museum, overflowing with priceless treasures from pottery to bronze mirrors to Buddhas. Downstairs are two excellent Japanese *izakaya* (restaurant/bars); see “Where to Dine,” below.

7–3 Chuo-cho, Kagoshima 890-0053. ☎ 099/252-1401. Fax 099/252-1405. 48 units. ¥5,300 (\$48) single; ¥8,500 (\$77) double or twin; ¥12,000 (\$100) triple. Breakfast ¥500 (\$4.15) extra. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Nishi Kagoshima (3 min.). Walk down wide, tree-lined Napoli Dori 2 blocks and turn left; it's at the end of the street on the left. **Amenities:** 2 bars (Japanese izakaya, open only at night); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, washlet toilet.

JR Kyushu Hotel Kagoshima Convenient to Nishi-Kagoshima Station (you can enter it right from the station), this business hotel offers clean, mostly single rooms, devoid of character but equipped with everything you might need. Ask for

a room on a higher floor with views of Sakurajima or the mountains. The biggest plus besides convenience: Japan Rail Pass holders receive a 10% discount.

1–12 Take, Kagoshima 890-0045. ☎ 099/213-8000. Fax 099/213-8029. www.jrk-hotels.com/kagoshima. 138 units. ¥6,500 (\$54) single; ¥12,000 (\$100) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Nishi Kagoshima (west exit). **Amenities:** In-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed dataport, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Nakazono Ryokan A member of the Japanese Inn Group, this simple ryokan with Japanese-style rooms offers a convenient location, public baths open 24 hours, and an English-speaking owner who is knowledgeable about area sightseeing—he has even prepared handouts on how to get to Ibusuki and Chiran. No meals are served, but there's a communal refrigerator, and the owner will direct you to nearby restaurants or, if you wish, help you order delivery pizza or sushi.

1–18 Yasui-cho, Kagoshima 892-0815. ☎ 099/226-5125. Fax 099/226-5126. www.satsuma.ne.jp/myhome/shindon. 10 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) twin; ¥11,400 (\$95) triple. Rates include tax. Closed Aug 13–15. AE, V. Station: Kagoshima (7 min.). Follow the streetcar along Densha Dori (or take the streetcar 3 stops to Shiyakusho-mae) for about 5 min. until you pass a temple on your left; turn left at the next alley, and then turn left again. **Amenities:** Coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C, coin-op TV, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

While in Kagoshima, be sure to try its local dishes, known as **Satsuma cooking** (Satsuma was the original name of the Kagoshima area). This style of cooking supposedly has its origins in food cooked on battlefields centuries ago; if that's the case, it certainly has improved greatly since then. Popular Satsuma specialties include *Satsuma-age* (ground fish mixed with tofu and sake and then deep-fried), *tonkotsu* (pork that has been boiled for several hours in miso, shochu, and brown sugar—absolutely delicious), and *Satsuma-jiru* (miso soup with chicken and locally grown vegetables including Sakurajima radishes). *Kibinago* is a small fish belonging to the herring family that can be caught in the waters around Kagoshima; a silver color with brown stripes, it's often eaten raw and arranged on a dish to resemble a chrysanthemum.

EXPENSIVE

Kumasotei ★★ SATSUMA SPECIALTIES Located in the city center, this restaurant specializes in local Satsuma dishes but carries it one step further by featuring them as part of kaiseki set meals. It reminds me more of a private home or ryokan since dining is in individual tatami rooms. If there isn't a crowd, you'll probably have your own private room; otherwise, you'll share. The main menu is in Japanese, but there's a smaller menu in English with photos of the various set meals, which may include such local dishes as Satsuma-age, tonkotsu, Satsuma-jiru, or kibinago, as well as *zakezushi* (rice that has been soaked in sake all day and then mixed with ingredients like vegetables and shrimp), bonito baked with salt, and *awameshi* (rice mixed with wheat). A good choice for dinner is the ¥4,800 (\$40) Taka set course, which includes several local dishes served kaiseki style.

6–10 Higashi Sengoku-cho. ☎ 099/222-6356. Set dinner ¥3,000–¥10,000 (\$25–\$83); set lunch from ¥1,800 (\$15). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5–10pm (last order). Streetcar: Tenmonkan-Dori (4 min.). Walk through the Tenmonkan-Dori covered shopping arcade (the one with the movie screen) 4 blocks and turn left; it will be on your right.

MODERATE

224 **Ajimori** ★ BLACK PORK This 25-year-old establishment specializes in pork from small black pigs, which the locals claim is more tender and succulent than regular pork. The restaurant is divided into two parts: the upper floors, with

both table seating and private tatami rooms, serve Satsuma Kuroshabu, a Kagoshima specialty of black-pork shabu; the first floor is a casual dining room specializing in *tonkatsu*, breaded black-pork cutlet. If you order the Kuroshabu, you'll eat it just like the more common beef shabu-shabu, cooking it yourself at your table by dipping it into a boiling broth and then in raw egg or sauce. Portions are generous, but if you wish, you can also order tonkatsu as a side dish. Otherwise, go to the first floor for perhaps the lightest, best-tasting tonkatsu you'll ever have; the set lunches, available every day except Sundays and holidays, are a bargain.

13–21 Sennicho. ☎ 099/224-7634. Shabu set dinner ¥4,000–¥8,000 (\$33–\$67), shabu set lunch ¥3,000 (\$25); tonkatsu set dinner ¥780–¥3,000 (\$6.50–\$25), tonkatsu set lunch ¥600–¥650 (\$5–\$5.40). DC, MC, V accepted only for meals costing more than ¥10,000 (\$83). Daily noon–2:30pm (noon–1:30pm for shabu) and 5:30–9pm (8pm last order for shabu). Streetcar: Tenmonkan-Dori (3 min.). Walk through the Tenmonkan-Dori covered arcade (the one beside Taka Pla, opposite the billboard that looks like a movie screen) and keep going past the Koban police box; it's on the left just before the 2nd arch with the eyeglasses motif, in a modern building with color photos outside.

Iso Kuwahara-kan CONTINENTAL If you are sightseeing at Sangenen, have lunch in this pleasant, historic building constructed in a Western style and dating from 1904. Built for the Shimazu clan to serve as an assay office, today it houses a Western restaurant specializing in set meals, with offerings that may include seafood risotto, steak, and escalope de veau.

9688–1 Yoshinocho. ☎ 099/248-5883. Set dinner ¥2,500–¥7,000 (\$21–\$58); set lunch ¥1,500–¥5,000 (\$13–\$42). No credit cards. Daily 11am–11pm. City View Bus: Sengen-mae stop (1 min.).

INEXPENSIVE

②25 **Noboruya** *Finds* RAMEN NOODLES This popular, inexpensive restaurant in the center of town is Kagoshima's best-known *ramen* (noodle) shop, in business for 55 years. It's a simple place, occupying one room of a small, wooden home with one counter and an open kitchen. Since only one dish is served, there's no problem ordering. A big bowl of ramen comes with noodles (made fresh every day) and slices of pork, all seasoned with garlic. You also get pickled radish (supposedly good for the stomach) and tea. As you eat your ramen at the counter, you can watch an army of women peeling garlic and cooking huge pots of noodles over gas flames—it's a great place to soak up local atmosphere.

2–15 Horie-cho. ☎ 099/226-6697. Noodles ¥1,000 (\$9). No credit cards. Mon–Sat 11am–7pm. Streetcar: Izuro-Dori (1 min.). Walk down the wide street marked by stone lanterns on each side (Miami Dori) and take the 1st right; Noboruya is at the end of the 2nd block on the left, with its entrance around the corner.

Takezo VARIED JAPANESE Artwork from the owner's private collection and classical music lift this inexpensive Japanese pub out of the ordinary. Seated at low tables with leg wells, you can dine on local specialties like Satsuma-age, as well as on healthy dishes like free-range chicken and lots of salads (from tofu and daikon to Caesar). The menu is in Japanese only, but the staff speaks some English. It's a popular hangout for young people and office workers out with the boss.

Gasthof Hotel B1, 7–3 Chuo-cho, Kagoshima 890-0053. ☎ 099/255-8035. Main dishes ¥600–¥1,500 (\$5–\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 6pm–1am. Station: Nishi Kagoshima (3 min.). Walk down wide, tree-lined Napoli Dori 2 blocks and turn left; it's at the end of the street on the left.

5 Southern Kyushu's Top Spa: Ibusuki ★

50km (31 miles) S of Kagoshima

At the southern tip of the Satsuma Peninsula, **Ibusuki** (pronounced “ee-boo-ski”) is southern Kyushu's most famous hot-spring resort and is home to 31,300 residents. With a pleasant average temperature of 64.5°F (18°C), it's a region of

lush vegetation, flowers, and palm trees. It also boasts Japan's best natural hot-sand bath.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Ibusuki is approximately an hour from Nishi Kagoshima Station by **JR train**; the fare is ¥970 (\$8.10) one-way. **Buses** depart from Kagoshima's Yamagataya Bus Center in the heart of the city (near the Asahi Dori streetcar stop) 10 times a day (some make stops at Nishi Kagoshima Station before traveling onward), reaching Ibusuki's train station 1½ hours later and costing ¥850 (\$7.10) one-way.

Because the sights of southern Kyushu are spread out, you might wish to travel directly to Ibusuki by bus or train, spend the night, and then return to Kagoshima on a guided tour (see "What to See & Do," below for more information).

VISITOR INFORMATION The leaflet "Walk Ibusuki" contains lots of useful information and is available from the Tourist Information Centers in Ibusuki Station, Nishi-Kagoshima Station, Kagoshima Station, and Kagoshima Prefectural Tourist Office. **Ibusuki Tourist Information** (☎ 0993/22-4114; open daily 9am–6pm) is located in Ibusuki Station. For online information, go to www.city.ibusuki.kagoshima.jp.

GETTING AROUND The small town of Ibusuki is spread along the coast, and public **buses** run along the main streets. **Taxis** are also readily available.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

TAKING A HOT-SAND BATH The most popular thing to do in Ibusuki is to have yourself buried up to your neck in black sand at Yunohama Beach, heated naturally by hot springs that surface close to the ground before running into the sea. To take part, head to the **Natural Sand Bath** ♀♂♂ (**Sana Mushi Onsen**; ☎ 0993/23-3900; open daily 8:30am–noon and 1–9pm), a modern facility nicknamed Saraku by the locals (*saraku* has two meanings: to walk around and to enjoy the sand). Take the elevator up to the reception, pay ¥900 (\$7.50) for the baths and rental yukata (add another ¥100/85¢ if you didn't bring a towel), change into the yukata in the dressing room, and then head down to the beach. One of the women there will dig you a shallow grave. Lie down, arrange your yukata so no vulnerable areas are exposed, and then lie still while she piles sand on top of you. It's quite a funny sight, actually, to see nothing but heads sticking out of the ground. The water, a hot 185°F (85°C), contains sodium chloride and is considered beneficial in alleviating rheumatism, arthritis, gastrointestinal troubles, neuralgia, and female disorders. It is also valued as a beauty treatment for the skin. After your 15-minute sand bath, go indoors for a relaxing, hot-spring bath. The Natural Sand Bath is a 10-minute walk from Ibusuki Station; from the main exit, walk straight to the beach and turn right. You can also take a bus to the Saraku-mae stop; the bus announces it as "Sanamushi-mae."

SEEING THE SIGHTS Southern Kyushu's main attractions are all natural wonders. **Mount Kaimon**, rising 900m (3,000 ft.) above sea level, has a conical shape that has earned it the nickname "Mount Fuji of Satsuma," and it affords a grand view of the sea from its peak. **Lake Ikeda**, Kyushu's largest lake, is a crater lake formed after the collapse of a volcano. With a depth of 230m (765 ft.), it's home to gigantic eels, some of which weigh as much as 15 kilograms (33 lb.) and measure about 1.8m (6 ft.) in length. According to popular lore, the lake also has its own Loch Ness monster, fondly named Isshy. At **Nagasaki Point**,

Kyushu's southernmost point, is **Flower Park Kagoshima** (☎ 0993/35-3333; open daily 9am–5pm), Japan's largest flower garden, with approximately 2,000 species of mostly subtropical flowers and plants collected from around the world. Admission is ¥600 (\$5) for adults, half price for children.

Because public bus lines to areas around Ibusuki are neither extensive nor frequent, it's best to join a **group tour**, which you can pick up in Ibusuki and which ends in Kagoshima. Although conducted only in Japanese, tours go to all the main sights, including a local shochu factory, Nagisakabana and Flower Park Kagoshima, Mount Kaimon peak, Lake Ikeda, and Chiran with its Peace Museum and samurai gardens. Tours depart daily from Ibusuki Station at 10:10am, arriving at Nishi Kagoshima Station at 5:55pm. Costs are ¥3,800 (\$32) for adults and ¥1,990 (\$17) for children. For more information, call the **Kagoshima Kotsu** bus company's office in Ibusuki at ☎ 0993/22-2211.

GOLF In **Mount Kaimon Natural Park**, at the foot of Mount Kaimon, you'll find the 18-hole **Ibusuki Golf Course**. Greens fees are ¥13,000 (\$108) on weekdays, ¥20,000 (\$167) on Saturday, ¥21,000 (\$175) on Sunday and holidays. For more information, call the golf course at ☎ 0993/32-3141.

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE

②②⑥ **Hakusuikan Ryokan** ★★☆☆ A driveway lined with pine trees sets the mood for this modern, elegant, and resortlike ryokan right on the beach with one of the most impressive hot-spring baths I've ever seen. Established in 1960 and expanded over the years, the ryokan seems like a village, with corridors that stretch seemingly forever and serve as galleries for an extensive collection of antique Satsuma and Chinese pottery, calligraphy, and old photographs. The public bath—a reproduction of an Edo-Period hot-spring spa—is classy and refined, also designed like a small village with a large bathing area made of cypress wood and stone with pools of varying temperatures, a huge *rotenburo* (outdoor hot-spring pool), a sand bath, a steam room, and a replica Edo-Era sauna with a round dome. Even the dressing rooms are faithfully styled after the Edo Period, though naturally they contain all the latest conveniences.

Several room types are available. Least expensive are the 30 Western-style twins, all of which face inland and are rather ordinary looking. Better are the Japanese-style tatami rooms facing the sea, but if you can afford it, spring for one of the ryokan's 100 combination rooms, spacious with both beds and separate tatami areas. Breakfasts are Western or Japanese buffets, while Japanese dinners are served as buffets only during busy seasons. This place is the perfect getaway.

Chirinosato, Ibusuki 891-0404. ☎ 0993/22-3131, or 0993/23-3898 for reservations. Fax 0993/23-3860. www.hakusuikan.co.jp. 205 units. ¥15,000–¥35,000 (\$125–\$292) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 5 min. from Ibusuki Station. (No public transportation.) **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (all Japanese); bar; 2 lounges; nightclub; fantastic indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; outdoor swimming pool; children's pool; shopping arcade; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV w/pay movies, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Ibusuki Iwasaki Hotel ★ This is Ibusuki's best-known spa hotel, a self-contained resort on 50 hectares (125 acres) of lush tropical grounds with pleasant walking trails throughout. It's very popular with Japanese tour groups, both for its facilities that include huge public baths, outdoor swimming pools, and a golf course (ask about golf packages), and for its evening entertainment. If you come during the off season, however, you have the hotel seemingly to yourself. Another plus are the resort's private museums, one featuring Japanese artists

painting in the Western style and the other displaying crafts from Papua New Guinea as well as Satsuma pottery.

All rooms have either a full or partial view of the sea and a balcony; the best rooms also have views of the wonderful garden, one of the resort's best features and well worth a stroll. The majority of rooms are twins (there are no singles). Not quite as nice as Japanese-style rooms, which are rather small and are located in an older building. In any case, nights here are nice, with the sound of waves and the frogs croaking in the lotus pond.

3755 Juni-cho, Ibusuki 891-0493. ☎ 0993/22-2131, or 0993/24-3888 for reservations. Fax 0993/24-3215. 366 units. ¥9,000–¥15,000 (\$75–\$125) twin, from ¥23,000 (\$192) twin in peak season. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 5 min. from Ibusuki Station. Bus: to Ibusuki Iwasaki Hotel, the last stop. **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; nightclub; casino/bar; outdoor swimming pool; children's pool; fitness room (fee: ¥500/\$4.15); Ibusuki Golf Course (fee: ¥11,000/\$92 weekdays, ¥18,000/\$150 weekends and holidays); tennis courts; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths overlooking the sea; hot-sand baths (fee: ¥1,050/\$8.75); Jacuzzi; bowling arcade; game center; rental bicycles; fine art and traditional crafts museum; shopping arcade; room service (7–9am, 6–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

②27 **Kyuka-Mura Ibusuki** *Value* This government-owned lodge is located right at the water's edge (but a bit far from town) and offers reasonably priced, basic accommodations, making it a popular choice with Japanese families. During summer vacation months, on New Year's, in March during spring vacation, and in May during school trips, you should reserve 6 months in advance. At other times, it's relatively easy to get a room here. Rates are based on the type of room and meals you select. Cheapest are the eight Western-style rooms, which face inland and have toilets but no bathrooms. Most expensive are Japanese-style rooms facing the sea with bathroom and fridge; some even have a balcony. If you are an early riser, take advantage of free transportation to the fisherman's market every Sunday at 6am.

Higashikata, Shiomi-cho, Ibusuki 891-0491. ☎ 0993/22-3211. Fax 0993/22-3213. 65 units (7 with bathroom, 58 with toilet only). ¥7,200–¥15,500 (\$60–\$129) per person. Rates include breakfast and dinner. AE, MC, V. Free shuttle buses depart from in front of Ibusuki Station after every train arrival; look for a purple bus with OKAMURA written on it. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); lounge; outdoor pool (fee: ¥300/\$2.50); tennis courts; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; sand baths (¥840/\$7); Ping-Pong table; rental bikes; game center; in-room massage; coin-op washers/dryers. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, safe, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

②28 **Marutomi** ★ Located just a minute's walk from the Natural Sand Bath at Yunohama Beach, this inexpensive inn is a family-run affair. The owner is a fisherman, so you can count on fresh seafood meals. And following the ryokan tradition of naming rooms instead of assigning numbers—rooms are commonly named after flowers; rooms here are named after fish—you can stay in the Tuna Room! All the rooms are Japanese-style—clean and with more character than many in this price range. Meals are served communally on tatami at low tables. Several blocks north is an annex, Marutomi2, with indoor/outdoor hot-springs baths, a communal kitchen, and eight additional rooms. Guests can use facilities at both inns. If you call from the station, the owner may be able to pick you up.

5–24–15 Yunohama, Ibusuki 891-04061. ☎ 0993/22-5579. Fax 0993/22-3993. 10 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) per person without meals, ¥7,000 (\$58) per person with dinner and breakfast. No credit cards. Station: Ibusuki (10 min.). From the main exit, walk straight to the beach and turn right; after passing the Natural Sand Bath, turn right and walk uphill. Bus: Going in the direction of the Ibusuki Iwasaki Hotel (ask for the Ibusuki Iwasaki Hotel yuki bus; the bus does not have a number), get off at the Saraku-mae stop ("Sunamushi-mae" is announced in the bus) and walk inland up the hill (1 min.). It's on the right. **Amenities:** Small hot-spring bath; free washing machine. *In room:* A/C, TV, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

(229) Chozjuan ★★ *(Finds)* **SOMEN NOODLES** If you're adventurous, try this fun, open-air restaurant in the countryside near Mount Kaimon. Serving as a lunch stop for some of the organized tours of the area, it specializes in *somen*, or cold noodles. Seating is under a pavilion beside a man-made waterfall, so you eat to the accompaniment of running water with Japanese traditional music playing in the background. In the middle of your table will be a large round container with water swirling in a circle; when you get your basket of noodles, dump them into the cold water, fish them out with your chopsticks, dip them in soy sauce, and enjoy. There are also four set menus, which come with such main dishes as grilled trout or carp sashimi, along with vegetables and soup.

If you can't get out to the countryside, **Chozjuan** (below) has a branch just a 10-minute walk from Ibusuki Station at 12-495-1 Ibusuki (☎ 0993/22-5272; open daily 11am–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm). Although it doesn't have the grand setting of its country cousin, it's pleasant enough, with a tall ceiling reminiscent of a traditional farmhouse. Its menu is also more varied, with specialties centering on noodles, tempura, kaiseki, and local Kagoshima dishes. Soba set meals start at ¥1,000 (\$8.35), a tempura teishoku is ¥2,500 (\$21), and shabu-shabu ranges from ¥2,500 to ¥3,500 (\$21–\$29). Walk straight out of the main exit of the station, take the first right, then take the first left.

Kaimon-cho, Tosenkyo. ☎ 0993/32-3155. Noodles ¥530 (\$4.40); set meal ¥1,300–¥2,600 (\$11–\$22). No credit cards. May–June daily 10am–7pm; July–Aug daily 9am–9pm; Sept–Apr daily 10am–5pm. Bus: 8 departures daily from Ibusuki Station (a 30-min. ride), including departures at 10:15am, 11:50am, and 1:55pm. Ask for the bus to Chozjuan.

6 Kumamoto ★

1,293km (804 miles) W of Tokyo; 189km (118 miles) S of Fukuoka

Located roughly halfway down Kyushu's western side, Kumamoto boasts a fine castle and a landscaped garden, both with origins stretching back to the first half of the 17th century. Once one of Japan's most important castle towns, Kumamoto today is the progressive capital of Kumamoto Prefecture, with a population of 660,000. Yet it retains a small town atmosphere, which is precisely why I like it.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **JAL, JAS,** and **ANA** fly to Kumamoto from Tokyo in 1 hour and 40 minutes, with fares averaging ¥31,000 (\$258) one-way. Airport shuttle buses operate from the airport to Kumamoto Station and the Kumamoto Kotsu (bus) Center downtown, taking about 50 minutes and costing ¥670 (\$5.60).

By Train It takes more than 9 hours to reach Kumamoto from **Tokyo**, with a change in trains at Hakata Station in **Fukuoka**. The fare is ¥23,020 (\$192) one-way for an unreserved seat. Limited express trains depart from Fukuoka's Hakata Station three times an hour, reaching Kumamoto in about 1½ hours. There are also two express trains daily from **Beppu**, reaching Kumamoto in 3 hours.

VISITOR INFORMATION The leaflet "Kumamoto and Mount Aso," distributed by the Tourist Information Centers in Kyoto, Tokyo, or Narita or Kansai international airports, contains information on how to get to Kumamoto and places of interest in the city. In Kumamoto, there's a **Kumamoto Tourist Office** inside Kumamoto Station near the main exit (☎ 096/352-3743; open daily

9am–5:30pm, sometimes closed 1–2pm). It has a good English map and brochure and is staffed by helpful English speakers who can make lodging reservations. In the city center, there's another Kumamoto Tourist Information Center on the first floor of the **Sanbun Kaikan Building** (which is part of the Sangyo Bunka Kaikan complex; ☎ **096/322-5060**; open daily 9:30am–6pm, closed 2nd and 4th Mon of the month), opposite the Sunroad Shinshigai covered shopping street and in front of the Karashimacho streetcar stop. If you're coming by plane, stop by the **Kumamoto Airport Information Office** (☎ **096/232-2810**; open daily 6:50am–9:30pm).

More information is available on the city's website at www.city.kumamoto.kumamoto.jp.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND **Kumamoto Station** lies far south of the city's downtown area, but transportation between the two is easy via streetcar no. 2, which departs from in front of the station and reaches the downtown area in about 10 minutes. **Downtown** centers on two covered shopping streets called Shimotori and Sunroad Shinshigai, with many department stores, shops, hotels, bars, and restaurants in the area. Here, too, is the city's bus station, the **Kumamoto Kotsu Center**, from which all buses in the city depart. Just north of downtown, within walking distance, rises **Kumamoto Castle**, which is surrounded by moats, turrets, and expansive greenery, on the edge of which are several museums and historic sites. **Suizenji Garden** lies far to the east.

Getting around Kumamoto via **streetcar** is easy because there are only two lines. Streetcar no. 2 is most convenient for tourists; it departs from Kumamoto Station and passes through downtown and near Kumamoto Castle (stop: Kumamotojo-mae) before going onward to Suizenji Garden (stop: Suizenji-Koen-mae). Fares increase the farther you go, from ¥130 to ¥200 (\$1.10–\$1.65).

Because the grounds surrounding Kumamoto Castle encompass 97 hectares (242 acres), with a circumference of 9km (5½ miles), consider visiting sights on its perimeter via one of two **Kumamoto Castle tour buses**, which depart from Kumamoto Kotsu Center and make a circular route around the castle grounds every 30 minutes (every 15 min. during peak season, weekends, and holidays), stopping at Hosokawa Mansion, Kumamoto Prefectural Museum of Art, Kumamoto Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center, and other places of interest. Nicknamed the “Musashi” and the “Toryanse,” the tour buses charge ¥130 (\$1.10) for a single journey, ¥300 (\$2.50) for the whole day; children pay half fare.

If you plan to take public transportation at least four times in 1 day, you can save money by purchasing a **1-day pass**, which allows unlimited travel on all city buses (including the Castle tour bus) and streetcars for ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥250 (\$2.10) for children.

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS

Kumamoto Castle ★★ Completed in 1607, Kumamoto Castle is massive—it took 7 years to build. It was constructed under the direction of Kato Kiyomasa, a great warrior who fought alongside Tokugawa Ieyasu in battle and was rewarded for his loyalty with land. The castle was built atop a hill and had two main towers, 49 turrets, 29 gates, and 18 two-story gatehouses; to make the walls impossible for enemies to scale, they were built with curves at the bottom and nearly vertical at the top and were crowned with an overhang. More than 100 wells ensured water even during a siege, while camphor and ginkgo trees were planted for firewood and edible nuts. The castle passed into the possession of the Hosokawa family in 1632 and remained an important stronghold for the

Tokugawa shogunate throughout its 250 years of rule, particularly in campaigns against the powerful and independent-minded lords of southern Kyushu. During that time, 11 generations of the Hosokawa clan ruled over Kumamoto.

Much of the castle was destroyed in 1877 during the Seinan Rebellion led by Saigo Takamori, a samurai who was unhappy with the new policies of the Meiji government in which ancient samurai rights were rescinded. Saigo led a troop of samurai in an attack on the castle and its imperial troops, who remained under siege for 53 days before government reinforcements finally arrived and quelled the rebellion. When the smoke cleared, most of the castle lay in smoldering ruins.

The castle was reconstructed in 1960 of ferroconcrete, and although it's not nearly as massive as before, it's still quite impressive and remains Kumamoto's star attraction. The interior houses a museum with elaborately decorated palanquins, models of Kumamoto and the castle during the Edo Period, armor, swords, former possessions of both Kato Kiyomasa and the Hosokawa family, and rifles and other artifacts from the Seinan Rebellion. You can learn more about the castle and its history by picking up an English audio guide at the west gate of the castle grounds. Because the castle grounds are large, you'll probably spend more than an hour here. If you intend to visit Hosokawa Mansion (see "More to See & Do," below), buy a joint ticket for entrance to both sights (¥640/\$5.35 for adults and ¥240/\$2 for children).

1-1 Honmaru. © 096/352-5900. Admission ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Apr–Oct daily 8:30am–5:30pm; Nov–Mar daily 8:30am–4:30pm. Streetcar: Kumamotojo-mae (10 min.) or Shiyakusho-mae (6 min.). Bus: Kumamoto Castle bus "Toryanse" or "Musashi" to Kumamotojo stop (5 min.).

Suizenji Garden (Suizenji Jojuen) ★ Laid out in the 1630s by Hosokawa Tadatoshi as a retreat for the tea ceremony and as the grounds of a nearby temple, Suizenji Garden took about 80 years to complete. The garden wraps itself around a cold spring-fed lake (considered particularly good for making tea). But what makes the place especially interesting is that its design incorporates famous scenes in miniature from the 53 stages of the ancient **Tokaido Highway**, which connected Kyoto and Tokyo. (The 53 stages were also immortalized in Hiroshige's famous woodblock prints.) Most recognizable are cone-shaped Mount Fuji and Lake Biwa; near the garden's entrance is Nihon Bashi (Bridge of Japan), Edo's starting point on the Tokaido Road. The park is small—almost disappointingly so—and for the life of me, I can't figure out more than a handful of the 53 stages. Maybe you'll have better luck. On its grounds is a 400-year-old **thatched-roof teahouse** beside a pond, transported from the imperial grounds in Kyoto, as well as **Izumi Shrine**, built in 1878 and dedicated to the Hosokawa lords. Near the garden's entrance is a teahouse where you can sip tea and look out over the pond. Plan on spending an hour here.

8-1 Suizenji Koen. © 096/383-0074. Admission ¥400 (\$3.35) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) children. Mar–Nov daily 7:30am–6pm; Dec–Feb daily 8am–5pm. Streetcar: no. 2 from Kumamoto Station or the downtown area to Suizenji-Koen-mae (about a 20-min. ride), followed by a 3-min. walk.

Moments **Moonlight Dining**

After 6pm (5pm in winter), there's a small door beside the main entrance to the **Suizenji Garden** that remains unlocked, allowing you to enter for free and dine at a garden restaurant (see "Where to Dine," later in this section). If you want to do some moon gazing, this is the place to do it.

MORE TO SEE & DO

Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamoto Since it's free (except during special exhibitions), you might consider making a 30-minute stop at this downtown museum showcasing works by local artist Ide Nobumichi, as well as works by other Kumamoto artists and exhibitions from abroad.

2–3 Kamitori-cho. ☎ 096/278-7500. Free admission. Wed–Mon 10am–7:30pm. Streetcar: Torichosuji (1 min.)

Hosokawa Mansion (Kyu-Hosokawa Gyobutei) A 10-minute walk north of Kumamoto Castle, this 300-year-old samurai mansion was built by a subsidiary member of the Hosokawa clan, Lord Gyobu, and was enlarged in the 1800s. Guided tours lasting 25 minutes take visitors through various rooms, including the lord's study and reception room, teahouse, kitchen, and servants' quarters. You'll see Edo-Era furnishings and personal items including an Edo clock, a suitcase, clothing, a woman's cosmetic case, lacquerware, a kimono chest, and more, giving you a good idea of how feudal lords lived during the Edo Period.

3–1 Furukyo-machi. ☎ 096/352-6522. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥100 (85¢) children. Combination ticket for Hosokawa Mansion and Kumamoto Castle ¥640 (\$5.35) adults, ¥240 (\$2) children. Apr–Oct daily 8:30am–5:30pm; Nov–Mar daily 8:30am–4:30pm. Bus: Kumamoto Castle bus "Toryanse" or "Musashi" to Kyu-Hosokawa Gyobutei stop (1 min.).

Kumamoto Prefectural Art Museum (Kumamoto Kenritsu Bijutsukan)

This prefectural art museum displays a little bit of everything, including traditional and modern Japanese art, works by Western old masters and contemporary artists, scrolls, screens, ceramics, lacquerware, tea utensils, and other applied arts. Works from the museum's collection are rotated in shows based on various themes, but you may see art by Noda Hideo, Katayama Nanpu, and Sakamoto Zenzo, as well as Albrecht Dürer, Renoir, and Picasso. There are better art museums in Japan, so come here only if you have an extra hour or if art is your particular passion.

2 Ninomaru. ☎ 096/352-2111. Admission ¥260 (\$1.90) adults, ¥160 (\$1.35) students, free for children; more for special exhibits. Tues–Sun 9:30am–4:30pm. Bus: Kumamoto Castle bus "Toryanse" or "Musashi" to Kumamotojo stop (3 min.). Streetcar: Kumamotojo-mae or Shiyakusho-mae (10 min.). On the castle grounds, just northwest of the castle.

SHOOTING THE KUMAGAWA RAPIDS ⚡⚡

If you've had enough of shrines, castles, and gardens, consider shooting the **Kumagawa Rapids**. Compared to wild rivers in the United States, the Kumagawa seems pretty tame; people do the trip not so much for the thrill of the ride but for the scenery of a narrow river valley bordered by wooded hills. It makes for a pleasant outing. Reservations are necessary for the two types of rides: One uses long, traditional, wooden boats steered by boatmen fore and aft (they will let you have a go at it); the other uses modern rafts guided by a staff of young professionals and goes through slightly rougher water.

The **Kumagawa Kudari Kabushiki Company**, Shimoshin-machi 333–1 (a 20-min. walk from Hitoyoshi Station), Hitoyoshi City (☎ 0966/22-5555), offers two different 90-minute routes in its wooden boats. The **Seiryu Course (Calm Course)** covers 8km (5 miles) of a rather gentle stretch of the river beginning in Hitoyoshi and ending in Watari. It's offered year-round; December through February, the boats have *kotatsu* (heated blankets). The cost is ¥2,835 (\$24) for adults and ¥1,890 (\$16) for children; winter trips with *kotatsu* cost ¥3,675 (\$31) and ¥2,835 (\$24) respectively. The **Kyuryu Course (Rapids Course)** covers 10km (6¼ miles), beginning in Watari and ending in Kyusendo,

and is more exciting, though the river is still only a grade 2. This trip is offered April through October and costs ¥3,675 (\$31) for adults and ¥2,100 (\$18) for children. During rainy season (mid-June to mid-July), the Kyuryu trips are sometimes canceled due to swollen rivers or high winds.

Kumagawa Kudari Kabushiki also offers rafting. The **Fighting Course** (90 min.) for ¥6,300 (\$53) begins at Watari Station; from there you'll be taken to Ishochi, where you will put in and raft to Kyusendo. The **All Around** rafting course (3 hr.) runs from Watari to Kyusendo and costs ¥7,875 (\$66). Both of these run year-round, include a post-trip soak in an onsen in Kunagawa, and conclude with a return trip via minibus to Watari. Note, however, that children under 11 and seniors over 60 are not allowed on these trips.

The **Land Earth Outdoor Sports Club**, 1379-1 Otsu, located 3 minutes from Watari Station (☎ 0966/34-7222), offers a 11km to 12km (6¾-mile–7½-mile) white-water rafting trip from Watari to Takahana. This trip is offered daily March through November. Participants should arrive at 9am for instruction (English spoken) and outfitting in wet suits; put-in is at 11am. Afterward, everyone goes to a hot-spring bath; the trip is completed by around 5:30 or 6pm. The cost, ¥12,800 (\$107), includes a Japanese-style barbecue lunch (which you cook yourself) and bath.

You can reach **Hitoyoshi** by bus from Kumamoto Kotsu Center in about 1½ hours, with fares costing ¥2,300 (\$19) one-way. There are also six trains a day from Kumamoto Station to Hitoyoshi; the express train takes 1½ hours. Trains and buses connect Watari and Kyusendo with Kumamoto. If you're coming to Kumamoto from **Kagoshima**, you might wish to stop off at Hitoyoshi on the way by taking a bus from Nishi Kagoshima Station to Hitoyoshi; it takes almost 2 hours and costs ¥2,050 (\$17). After your boat ride, you can then continue onward to Kumamoto.

SHOPPING

One of Kumamoto's most famous products is its Higo Inlay or **damascene**, in which gold, silver, and copper are inlaid on an iron plate to form patterns of flowers, bamboo, and other designs. Originally used to adorn sword guards and armor, damascene today is used on such accessories as paperweights, jewelry, and tie clasps. Another Kumamoto product is the **Yamaga lantern**, made of gold paper and used during the Yamaga Lighted Lantern Festival held in August. Other local products include Amakusa pearls, pottery, knives, toys, and bamboo items.

A wonderful place to see Kumamoto Prefecture's products and to learn how they're made is the (230) **Kumamoto Prefectural Traditional Crafts Center (Dento Kougeikan)**, northeast of Kumamoto Castle at 3-35 Chibajo-machi (☎ 096/324-4930; open Tues–Sun 9am–4:30pm). The center's second floor exhibits handmade crafts from all over the prefecture, along with displays showing the step-by-step procedure for producing them. Displays include toys, furniture, fans, wooden rice barrels, bamboo baskets, pottery, damascene, and kitchen knives sharp enough to chop through bone. The entrance fee—¥200 (\$1.65) for adults, ¥130 (\$1.10) for university students, and free for children under 18—is worth every yen. Local products are sold on the first floor in a gallery. Take streetcar no. 2 to the Shiyakusho-mae stop, from which it's a 5-minute walk.

South of Kumamoto Castle is the (231) **Display Hall of Kumamoto Products (Kumamoto-ken Bussankan)**, located on the third floor of the Sanbun Kaikan Building (which is part of the Sangyo Bunka Kaikan complex) at 7-10 Hanabata-cho (☎ 096/353-1168; open daily 10am–6pm, closed 2nd and 4th

Mon each month). It sells local products such as Higo Inlay, knives, pottery, Yamaga paper lanterns, Amakusa pearls, shochu, sake, and confections. The hall is located near the Kumamoto Kotsu Bus Center and opposite the Sunroad Shinshigai shopping arcade (the Kumamoto Tourist Information Center is in the same building). The Karashimacho streetcar stop is in front of the building.

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE

Hotel New Otani Kumamoto ★★ (Value) This hotel has everything: a convenient location next to the station, the respected New Otani name, a perceptive staff, and the latest in design and amenities—all at reasonable rates. Although with the opening of the Nikko (below) it is no longer the only game in town, it's still a fine choice. Rooms are spacious, with queen-size beds in both single and double rooms, and feature corner sofas with large coffee tables, and generous desk and counter areas. All rooms come with individual reading lights with dimmer switches, window blinds to block light, double-paned windows that block noise and can also be opened, massage showerheads, and such extras as hangers with nonslip pads and bathroom phones.

1–13–1 Kasuga, Kumamoto 860-0047. ☎ 800/421-8795 in the U.S. and Canada or 096/326-1111. Fax 096/326-0800. 30 units. ¥11,000–¥13,000 (\$92–\$108) single; ¥18,000–¥32,000 (\$150–\$267) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V.A 1-min. walk from Kumamoto Station; turn right out of the station. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, Western, coffee shop); 2 bars (1 with live piano music); sauna (fee: ¥1,000/\$8.35); souvenir shop/convenience store; room service (6am–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea and coffee, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Hotel Nikko Kumamoto ★★ In the same building as the Contemporary Art Museum and an adjoining shopping complex, this 14-story hotel (opened in 2002) is the most luxurious in Kumamoto. An inviting fireplace serves as the focal point of its two-story lobby, pleasingly decorated in strong contrasts of dark wood and light-colored marble. Large, comfortable rooms, with views of either Kumamoto Castle or Mount Aso in the distance, offer sitting areas, closets that light up as soon as you open them, and focused bedside reading lights. Singles sport double beds, doubles have queen-size beds, and twins have separate toilet/bath areas. More expensive twins are either corner rooms, with large view windows, or deluxe twins with upgraded amenities and lots of space.

2–1 Kamitori-cho, Kumamoto 860-8536. ☎ 800/645-5687 in the U.S. and Canada or 096/211-1111. Fax 096/211-1175. www.nikko-kumamoto.co.jp. 191 units. ¥14,000 (\$117) single; ¥35,000–¥38,000 (\$292–\$317) double; ¥23,000–¥38,000 (\$192–\$317) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 2 to Torichosuji (1 min.). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants (including Tao-Li; see "Where to Dine," below); lounge; concierge; 24-hr. convenience store; room service (11am–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable/satellite TV, high-speed dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Ark Hotel ★★ If you want to stay close to the castle, this is a great choice in a moderate price range. It has a relaxed, gardenlike atmosphere, from the bamboo garden in the lobby to the flower-patterned rooms. There's even a small rooftop garden with a path leading to a tea-ceremony house (used for private functions). Rooms are more than the usual boxes, with added architectural details like alcove ceilings and fashionable furniture. Rooms on the seventh to ninth floors look out on the Tsuboigawa River and the castle, though an unsightly NHK broadcasting tower mars the view.

5–16 Joto-machi, Kumamoto 860-0846. ☎ 096/351-2222. Fax 096/326-0909. <http://kumamoto.ark-hotel.co.jp>. 222 units. ¥8,000–¥9,100 (\$67–\$76) single; ¥16,000 (\$133) double; ¥14,500–¥24,500 (\$121–\$204)

twin. AE, MC, V. Just east of the castle. Streetcar: no. 2 to Shiyakusho-mae, then a 5-min. walk north 3 blocks. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Western); in-room massage; laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Kumamoto Hotel Castle This tall brick hotel is just east of Kumamoto Castle, with good views of the castle from some of its more expensive twin rooms. A subdued, quiet, and conservative hotel, it's popular with middle-aged Japanese, including locals who come for receptions or to dine in one of its restaurants. Rooms are a little worn but comfortable, with modern furniture and headboard controls; deluxe twins and singles offer semi-double-size beds and sofas in a more spacious setting.

4-2 Joto-machi, Kumamoto 860-8565. ☎ **096/326-3311**. Fax 096/326-3324. www.hotel-castle.co.jp. 185 units. ¥8,900–¥14,500 (\$74–\$121) single; ¥17,000–¥21,000 (\$142–\$175) double; ¥16,000–¥25,000 (\$133–\$208) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 2, 15 min. to Shiyakusho-mae, then a 2-min. walk north 1 block. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, French, Chinese, coffee shop); bar; salon; room service (7:30pm–midnight); in-room massage; laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

Kajita Two pug-nosed dogs (real) in a cage by the front door, and a mongoose, a cobra, and birds (stuffed) in the lobby, greet you at this friendly, family-run establishment, a member of the Japanese Inn Group. It has a central location, just a 10-minute walk to the castle grounds and a 5-minute walk to the streetcar that will take you onward to Suizenji Garden. Tatami rooms, named after flowers, are simple but clean. If you call, you'll most likely be picked up at the station, though if no car is available, someone will wait for you at the bus stop. A cupboard in the hall has self-service coffee and tea free of charge.

1-2-7 Shinmachi, Kumamoto 860-0004. ☎ **096/353-1546**. Fax 096/353-1546. kajita@titan.ocn.ne.jp. 10 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) single; ¥7,200 (\$60) double; ¥10,500 (\$88) triple. Breakfast ¥700 (\$5.85) extra; dinner ¥2,000 (\$17) extra. AE, V. Bus: from Kumamoto Station to Shinmachi stop, then a 2-min. walk. Take the narrow road between a bank and a big health center (with round windows) and then take the 1st left. It's on the left. **Amenities:** Coin-op washer/dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

Tokyu Inn Right in the middle of downtown near department stores and shopping, this business hotel is connected to a 24-hour convenience store and offers mostly single rooms, cramped but containing everything you need. Location is this hotel's main selling point, as is the helpful, English-speaking staff.

7-25 Shinshigai, Kumamoto 860-0803. ☎ **096/322-0109**. Fax 096/322-3050. www.tokyuhotels.co.jp. 138 units. ¥6,500–¥7,500 (\$54–\$63) single; ¥10,300–¥11,000 (\$86–\$92) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 2 to Karashimacho, then a 1-min. walk. Next to the Sunroad Shinshigai covered shopping arcade. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese, Western); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

WHERE TO DINE

Kumamoto's specialties include *dengaku* (tofu, and sometimes taro and fish, coated with bean paste and grilled on a fire), *karashi renkon* (lotus root that has been boiled, filled with a mixture of bean paste and mustard, and then deep-fried), and *basashi* (raw horse meat sliced thin and then dipped in soy sauce flavored with ginger or garlic).

EXPENSIVE

②32 **Koshintei** ★★ ★ *Finds* KAISEKI Dine here to pretend you're living in a past era. Located near the New Sky Hotel between Kumamoto Station and downtown, Koshintei is one of several establishments housed in a unique



Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide with an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in appendix C showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, **Koshintei** (above), refer to no. 232 in appendix C.

complex comprised of three Edo-Period buildings, including the eclectically decorated Cafe Shingen, an inexpensive Japanese restaurant, and a shop of European antiques. Koshintei is a traditional Japanese house with private antique-filled tatami rooms, several of which face the river. There's no additional room fee, but note that there must be two or more of you to dine here. There are three choices for kaiseki dinners, costing ¥7,000 (\$58), ¥8,500 (\$71), and ¥10,000 (\$83); each is delivered by a kimono-clad waitress who serves in traditional style, kneeling each time she opens and closes the doors. Meals change monthly to match the seasons and come exquisitely arranged on beautiful dishes, also chosen with great care to match the season and the food. Lunches are quite reasonably priced.

15 Nakatoji-machi. ☎ **096/322-4231**. Reservations required. Lunch ¥3,000–¥5,000 (\$25–\$42); dinner ¥7,000–¥10,000 (\$58–\$83). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–11pm. Streetcar: Gofukumachi, then a 1-min. walk in the direction of downtown to the 1st stoplight and fire station; turn left and then left again.

Tao-Li ★ **NOUVELLE CANTONESE** This sophisticated restaurant in the heart of downtown serves Cantonese cuisine, though with a nouvelle twist to such standards as shark's fin soup, sweet and sour pork, and Peking duck. Set meals are the way to go with the English-language menu; the quite interesting and ample Yamushi set meal (¥2,000/\$17), for example, offers salad; clear broth with chicken paste, arrowroot, and clams; spring rolls with *yuba* (a tofu by-product); shrimp dumplings sprinkled with caviar; stewed pork and shrimp wrapped in a flat rice noodle; vegetables in ginger; green dumplings made with rice, leeks, spinach, and shrimp; hot vermicelli and black mushroom broth; tea; and dessert.

Hotel Nikko Kumamoto 2-1 Kamitori-cho. ☎ **096/211-1111**. Set lunch ¥1,500–¥2,000 (\$13–\$17); set dinner ¥4,000–¥10,000 (\$33–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–9:30pm (last order). Streetcar: no. 2 to Toricho-suji (1 min.).

MODERATE

(233) Aoyagi ★ **LOCAL SPECIALTIES** Everyone in Kumamoto knows this restaurant, located in the downtown area just off the Shimotori covered shopping arcade. It has four floors of dining with seating on tatami or at low tables with leg wells. There's a plastic-food display case outside its front door, showing dishes of sushi, basashi, eel, and *kamameshi* (rice casseroles). Kaiseki and Kyodo-ryori set meals begin at ¥5,000 (\$42); a Japanese menu shows pictures of the courses. You can also take out box lunches of sushi for ¥1,000 (\$8.35) and up.

1-2-10 Shimotori. ☎ **096/353-0311**. Set lunch ¥980–¥3,800 (\$8.15–\$32); set dinner ¥1,500–¥7,000 (\$13–\$58). AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Streetcar: Torichosuji (2 min.). Walk through the Shimotori shopping arcade 2 blocks to Sannenzakadori St. (just past Daiei) and turn right; it's on the 2nd block on the right.

(234) Senri ★★ **LOCAL SPECIALTIES/VARIED JAPANESE** You can try Kumamoto's local dishes at this restaurant right in Suizenji Garden, available from a Japanese menu featuring set meals. For lunch, you can choose main

dishes like eel, river fish, or tempura, served with side dishes of vegetable, soup, rice, and tea. Or order the Kyodo-ryori Course, which includes local specialties such as fried lotus, basashi, and dengaku (tofu, and sometimes taro and fish, coated with bean paste and grilled on a fire). Dinners include the same items as lunch plus extra dishes. For a splurge, order kaiseki. Dining is in small tatami rooms; choice rooms face the garden.

Suizenji Garden. ☎ 096/381-1415. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥3,000 – ¥3,500 (\$25–\$29); set lunch ¥2,000 – ¥3,500 (\$17–\$29); kaiseki set meals from ¥4,000 (\$33). No credit cards. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–7pm (last order). Streetcar: no. 2 to Suizenji-Koen-mae; Senri has its own entrance to the right of Suizenji Garden's main gate.

INEXPENSIVE

Fontana di Otani ITALIAN/CONTINENTAL This very casual coffee shop has a very convenient location in one of Kumamoto's most well-known hotels, right beside Kumamoto Station. Its menu features lighter fare such as pizza, pasta, curry dishes, risotto, and sandwiches, as well as more substantial dishes like grilled chicken, roasted lamb with thyme, steak, and seafood. There are also special seasonal menus.

Hotel New Otani Kumamoto, 1–13–1 Kasuga. ☎ 096/326-1111. Main dishes ¥1,000 – ¥2,000 (\$8.35–\$17); set lunch ¥1,300 (\$11); set dinner ¥2,500 – ¥3,300 (\$21–\$28). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. A 1-min. walk from Kumamoto Station; turn right out of the station.

②35 **Shingen Chikai** ★★ *Finds* VARIED JAPANESE Part of the Edo-Period complex that also houses Koshintei (see above), this basement restaurant is decorated with antiques, stone walls, a low ceiling with heavy wood crossbeams, and sophisticated black lacquered tables. It offers reasonably priced set dinners and an obento for lunch, as well as an à la carte menu written in Japanese that includes tempura, soba, and basashi. After your meal, you may want to stop for a drink at **Cafe Shingen** on the first floor (open daily 11am–11pm), a café like none other with its two-story high ceiling, stained-glass windows, antiques, and display cases of chinaware (which is for sale), all of which conspire to give it a flea-market atmosphere. Beginning at 8pm, a piano player serenades you on a century-old piano. Upstairs is a shop specializing in European antiques. All in all, this is not your usual dining experience.

15 Nakatoji-machi. ☎ 096/354-9583. Set lunch ¥1,500 (\$13); set dinner ¥1,800 and ¥3,500 (\$15 and \$29). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–10:30pm (last order). Streetcar: Gofukumachi (1 min.). Walk in the direction of downtown to the 1st stoplight and fire station, turn left, and then turn left again.

②36 **Tateki** ★ KUSHIAGE Located on a street filled with striptease clubs (be sure to match the kanji in appendix C with the sign outside the door—otherwise you'll get more than skewered food), Tateki serves *kushiage*, or skewered foods. Although kushiage isn't unusual cuisine in Japan, this restaurant's method of cooking and serving it is—instead of counter seating, behind which the cook prepares your food, here you sit on tatami while a waiter in a beret kneels at your personal hibachi and grills your meal right in front of you. The least-expensive set dinner comes with 10 sticks of meat and vegetables plus appetizer, salad, and soba; the other two set dinners add one or two sticks along with more side dishes. The set lunch consists of seven sticks, two sauces, rice, soup, appetizer, and salad.

Kaishika Building, 1–11–8 Shimotori. ☎ 096/325-4989. Set lunch ¥1,000 (\$8.35); set dinner ¥2,000 – ¥4,000 (\$17–\$33). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–11pm. Streetcar: Kumamotojo-mae (5 min.). Walk east on Ginza Dori 3 blocks, turn right into the Shimotori shopping arcade, and after 1 block turn right onto an unmarked street called Korinjidori; Tateki will be on the left in the 2nd building next to an eyeglasses shop.

7 Nagasaki

1,329km (826 miles) W of Tokyo; 152km (95 miles) SW of Fukuoka

Unlike Kumamoto or Kagoshima, **Nagasaki** doesn't have a castle or a famous landscaped garden. Rather, its charm is much more subtle. Many people in Japan—including foreign residents—consider this city one of the country's most beautiful. It's a place of hills rising from the deep, U-shaped harbor, of houses perched on terraced slopes, of small streets and distinctive neighborhoods, and of people extremely proud of their hometown. Without a doubt, Nagasaki is one of Japan's most livable cities, despite its population of almost half a million. Capital of Nagasaki Prefecture, Nagasaki is also perhaps Japan's most cosmopolitan city with a unique blend of outside cultures interwoven into its history, architecture, food, and festivals.

Nagasaki, which is located on the northwest coast of Kyushu, opened its harbor to European vessels in 1571 and became a port of call for Portuguese and Dutch ships; Chinese merchants soon followed and set up their own community. Along with traders came St. Francis Xavier and other Christian missionaries, primarily from Portugal and Spain, who found many converts among the local Japanese. During Japan's more than 200 years of isolation, only Nagasaki was allowed to conduct trade with outsiders and thus served as the nation's window on the rest of the world. Even today, Japanese come to Nagasaki for a dose of the city's intermingled cultures.

All of the city's major attractions are connected to its diversified, and sometimes tragic, past. Nagasaki is perhaps best known as the second city—and, I hope, the last city—to be destroyed by an atomic bomb.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE **By Plane** **ANA, JAL,** and **JAS** serve Nagasaki with 10 flights daily from Tokyo's Haneda Airport. Flight time is 1 hour and 45 minutes, and the fare is around ¥33,000 (\$275). Airport **limousine buses** connect with the Ken-ei Bus Terminal across from Nagasaki Station in about 1 hour and cost ¥1,200 (\$10).

By Train Trains depart Hakata Station in **Fukuoka** approximately every half-hour, arriving at Nagasaki Station a little more than 2 hours later at a cost of ¥4,410 (\$37). The train ride from **Kumamoto** takes 3 hours, with a change of trains in Tosu. From **Tokyo**, take the Shinkansen bullet train to Hakata Station and transfer there to a train to Nagasaki. Travel time is about 8½ hours, depending on connections; the fare is ¥21,210 (\$177) for an unreserved seat.

VISITOR INFORMATION Pick up the “Nagasaki and Unzen” leaflet from the Tourist Information Center in Tokyo, Kyoto, or Kansai or Narita international airports (see “Visitor Information,” in chapters 3, 7, and 8). In Nagasaki, the **Nagasaki City Tourist Information Office** (☎ 095/823-3631; open daily 8am–7pm, to 5:30pm mid-Nov through Feb) is located just outside the main exit of Nagasaki Station. Information on all of Nagasaki Prefecture (including Huis Ten Bosch and Unzen, described later in this chapter), is available just across the street from the train station at the **Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation** (☎ 095/826-9407; open daily 9am–5:30pm) on the second floor of the Ken-ei Bus Terminal.

Information on Nagasaki is available on the Internet at www1.city.nagasaki.jp.

INTERNET ACCESS On the ground floor of the station building (opposite side from the train exit), **Kinko's** (1-1 Onoue-machi, ☎ **095/818-2522**) is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and charges ¥200 (\$1.65) for 10 minutes of Internet access.

ORIENTATION Along with Kobe and Sapporo, Nagasaki is one of Japan's most navigable cities, with lots of signs in English pointing the way to attractions. City layout follows natural boundaries set by the Urakami River, the long and narrow Nagasaki Bay, and the many steep-sloped hills. **Nagasaki Station** isn't located in the downtown part of the city; rather, most nightspots, shops, and restaurants are located southeast of the station, clustered around an area that contains **Shianbashi Dori** and **Kanko Dori streets** and the **Hamanomachi** covered shopping arcade. Farther south is **Glover Garden**, where many foreigners settled in the 19th century. Nearby is **Hollanders Slope (Oranda-zaka**, also referred to as Dutch Slope), undoubtedly Nagasaki's prettiest street, a cobbled lane lined with wooden houses built by former European residents (a century ago, the people of Nagasaki referred to all Europeans as Hollanders). **Peace Park** and its atomic-bomb museum are located north of Nagasaki Station on the other end of town.

GETTING AROUND By Streetcar Streetcars have been hauling passengers in Nagasaki since 1915 and, from the looks of things, have changed little in the ensuing years; they're still the easiest—and most charming—way to get around. Four lines run through the heart of the city, and most stops are written in English. The streetcars are ancient one-wagon affairs, retired to Nagasaki from other cities that considered them too slow and old-fashioned—and yet, since streetcars have their own lanes of traffic here, during rush hour they're usually the fastest on the road. It costs a mere ¥100 (85¢) to ride one no matter how far you go; pay at the front when you get off. You are allowed to transfer to another line only at **Tsukimachi Station** (ask the driver for a *noritsugi*, a transfer ticket, when you disembark from the first streetcar); otherwise, you must buy a separate ticket each time you board. If you need change for, say, a ¥1,000 bill, you may ask the driver when he's waiting at a red light and isn't busy, an endearing anachronism in high-tech Japan. To avoid the hassle of individual tickets, you can also buy a ¥500 (\$4.15) **pass** at both tourist offices mentioned above and at major hotels; the pass allows unlimited rides for 1 day. Streetcars run from about 6:15am to 11:30pm.

On Foot With the exception of Peace Park, you can also get around Nagasaki easily on foot, which is certainly the most intimate way to experience the city and its atmosphere. You can walk from the Hamanomachi downtown shopping district to Glover Garden, for example, in 20 minutes, passing Chinatown, Dejima, and the Dutch Slope on the way. Shianbashi Dori, located just off the streetcar stop of the same name, is just a minute's walk from the Hamanomachi shopping arcade.

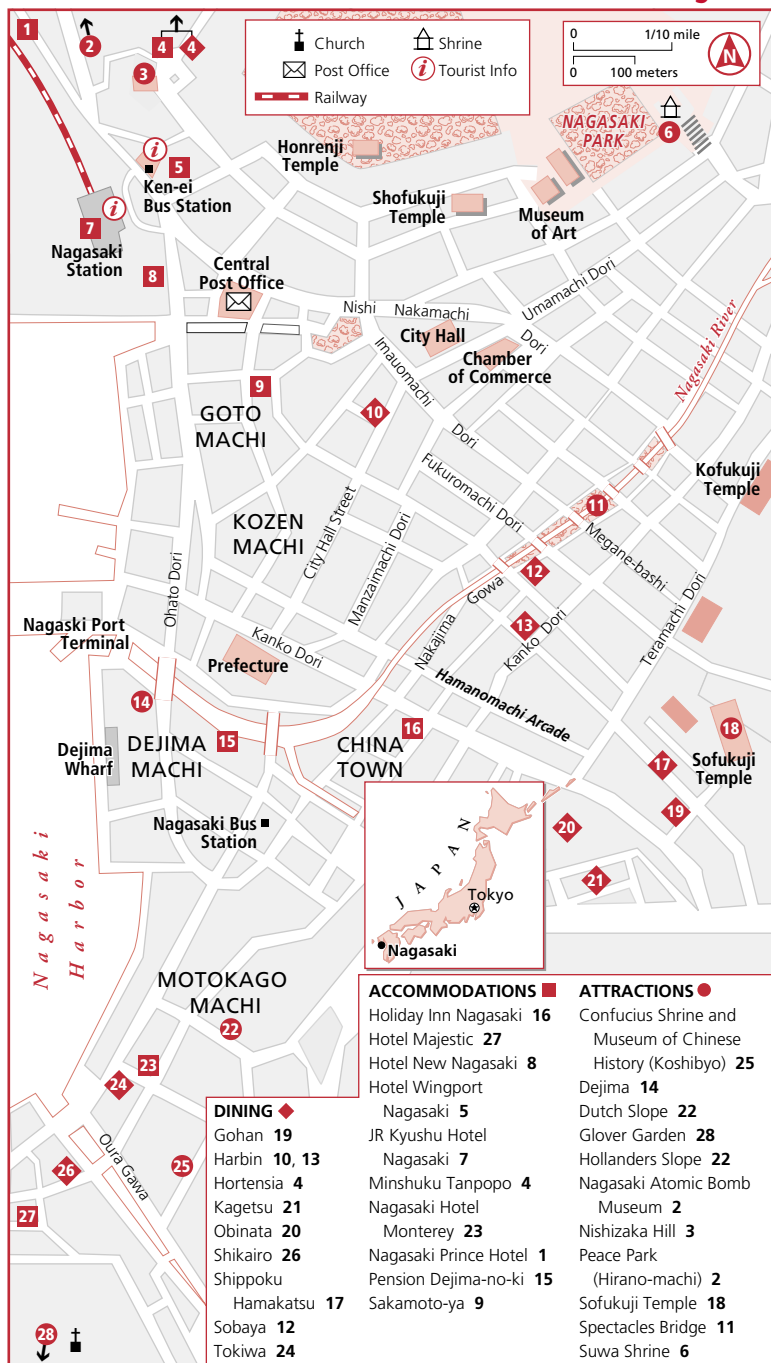
By Bus Nagasaki has buses, but destinations are in Japanese only—stick to the streetcars.

EXPLORING THE CITY

NISHIZAKA HILL

After Nagasaki opened its port to European vessels, missionaries came to the city to convert the Japanese to Christianity. Gradually, however, the Japanese rulers began to fear that these Christian missionaries would try to exert political and

Nagasaki



financial influence through their converts. Who was to say that conversion to Christianity wasn't the first step toward colonization? So in 1587, the shogun Toyotomi Hideyoshi officially banned Christianity. In 1597, 26 male Christians (20 Japanese and six foreigners) were arrested in Kyoto and Osaka, marched through the snow to Nagasaki, and crucified on **Nishizaka Hill** as examples of what would happen to offenders. Through the ensuing decades, there were more than 600 documented cases of Japanese, Portuguese, and Spanish Christians being put to death in the Nishizaka area. In 1862, the 26 martyrs were sainted by the pope.

Today, on Nishizaka Hill, about a 4-minute walk north of Nagasaki Station, there's the Monument to the 26 Saints, with statues of the martyrs carved in stone relief. Immediately striking is that three of them look very young; indeed, the youngest was only 12. Behind the relief is a small **museum** (☎ 095/822-6000; open daily 9am–5pm) housing artifacts relating to the history of Christianity in Japan, including paintings and drawings of the 26 saints, letters, and religious objects, as well as remains of Japanese martyrs returned to Nagasaki in 1995 after more than 380 years of interment in Macau. Perhaps most amazing about the history of Christianity in Japan is that the religion was practiced secretly by the faithful throughout Japan's isolation policy, surviving more than 200 years underground without the benefits of a church or clergy. Admission to the museum, which can be toured in a half-hour, is ¥250 (\$2.10) for adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) for junior-high and high-school students, and ¥100 (85¢) for children.

DEJIMA

When the Tokugawa shogunate adopted a national policy of isolation in the 1630s, only Nagasaki was allowed to remain open as a port of trade with foreigners. Since the Portuguese and Spaniards were associated with the outlawed Christian religion, they were expelled in 1639; only the Dutch and the Chinese were allowed to remain and continue trading. In 1641, all the Dutch were confined to a tiny, fan-shaped artificial island called Dejima, where they remained for 218 years (at any one time, about 15 Dutchmen were in residence; no wives were allowed). This was Japan's only official contact with the outside world; the director of Dejima was required to travel to Edo every 1 to 4 years to report to the shogun. Otherwise, the only people allowed to cross the bridge into the Dutch community were Japanese prostitutes and traders.

Today, after having long become part of the mainland through land reclamation and after decades of languishing as little more than a streetcar stop, Dejima has been reborn through an ambitious project that re-created the island as it was in the early 19th century. After you alight at the Dejima streetcar stop, go to the **Head Clerks Quarter's** (6–3 Dejima-machi; ☎ 095/821-7200), where you can pick up a map and information in English. From there you will be directed to a re-created kitchen, an excavated west-side embankment, the First Ship Captain's Quarters with furnishings of the period, the No. 1 Warehouse documenting the painstaking restoration of Dejima's historic buildings, and the No. 2 Warehouse describing Dejima's role in the introduction of Western science and culture to Japan. At the Dejima Theatre, a 12-minute video recaptures daily life in a former Dutch factory. In your wanderings you will also see a large outdoor model showing how the island looked when the Dutch lived here. But the most important thing to see in Dejima is the **Dejima Museum of History**, which is housed in a blue, colonial-style wooden building constructed in 1877 as Japan's first Protestant seminary. It gives an excellent account of the historical development

of the island, what life was like for the Dutch who lived here, and how the trading system worked. Nearby, in a replica of an old stone warehouse, is the museum's annex with folk objects from Holland and artifacts unearthed during excavations on Dejima. Admission to the No. 2 Warehouse plus the Dejima Museum with its annex is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults and ¥150 (\$1.25) for children; the other attractions listed above are free. Dejima is open daily 9am to 5pm. You'll probably spend about an hour here.

GLOVER GARDEN & VICINITY

Glover Garden ★★ After Japan opened its doors to the rest of the world and established Nagasaki as one of a handful of international ports, Nagasaki emerged as one of the most progressive cities in the country, with many foreign residents. A number of Western-style houses were built during the Meiji Period (1868–1912), many of them on a hill overlooking Nagasaki and the harbor. Today, that hill has been developed into Glover Garden, which showcases nine Meiji-Era buildings and homes on lushly landscaped grounds. Some of the structures stand on their original site; others have been moved here and given new life. The stone-and-clapboard houses have sweeping verandas, Western parlors, the most modern conveniences of the time, and Japanese-style roofs. Most famous is **Glover Mansion**, Japan's oldest Western-style house, built in this location in 1863 and romanticized as the home of Madame Butterfly, the fictitious, tragic heroine of Puccini's opera. Married to a Japanese woman (and much more faithful than his Puccini counterpart), Thomas Glover was a remarkable Scotsman who, among other things, financially backed and managed ship-repair yards in Nagasaki, brought the first steam locomotive to Japan, sold guns and ships, and exported tea.

Among the other buildings, a former boys' academy houses photographs of old Nagasaki, including portraits of foreigners who used to live here. The Mitsubishi Dock House, built in 1896 to serve as a rest house for ship crews, offers great views of the harbor. One of Nagasaki's first Western restaurants is now a quaint cafe. And don't miss the **Nagasaki Traditional Performing Arts Museum**, which displays floats and dragons used in Nagasaki's most famous festival, the Okunchi Festival, held in October. The museum's highlight is an excellent film of the colorful parade, featuring massive ships deftly maneuvered on wheels and Chinese dragon dances.

Incidentally, upon entering the grounds, you'll see a moving escalator carved into the hillside. Although an outdoor escalator in a garden devoted to Meiji-Era buildings might seem a little bizarre, the Japanese point out that it's there for the benefit of seniors who might find the climb up the hill too strenuous. At any rate, the views from here are among the best in the city. Plan on spending 2 hours if you want to see everything.

8-1 Minami Yamate-machi. ☎ 095/822-8223. Admission ¥600 (\$5) adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) high-school students, ¥180 (\$1.50) junior-high and elementary students. Daily 8am–6pm (to 9:30pm July 20–Sept). Streetcar: Oura Tenshudosita (7 min.); cross the bridge, turn left after the Tokyu Hotel, and walk uphill, following the signs.

PEACE PARK (HIRANO-MACHI) ★★

On August 9, 1945, at 11:02am, American forces dropped an atomic bomb over Nagasaki, 3 days after they had dropped one on Hiroshima. The bomb, which exploded 480m (1,600 ft.) aboveground, destroyed about a third of the city, killed an estimated 74,000 people, and injured 75,000 more. Today, Peace Park, located north of Nagasaki Station, serves as a reminder of that day of destruction

with a museum, memorials, and statues. Nagasaki's citizens are among the most vigorous peace activists in the world; a peace demonstration is held in Peace Park every year on the anniversary of the bombing.

Near the Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum (see below), a black pillar marks the exact epicenter of the atomic blast; a black casket contains names of the bomb's victims. Ironically, the bomb exploded almost directly over the Urakami Catholic Church, of which a fragmented wall remains. A few minutes farther north, separated by several streets, is the largest part of Peace Park (the nearest streetcar station to this section is Matsuyama). It occupies the site of a former prison; all 134 inmates died in the blast. A fountain is dedicated to the wounded who begged for water; many of them died thirsty. Statues donated by countries from around the world line a pathway leading to Peace Statue, a 9m (30-ft.) high statue of a male deity. One hand points to the sky from where the bomb came (meant as a warning?), and the other hand points to the horizon (representing hope? the future?).

Nagasaki Atomic Bomb Museum ★★☆☆ Visiting this museum, with displays in English, is by far the most important thing to do in Peace Park. After paying admission, guests enter an empty, glass-dome foyer with a spiraling ramp—bringing to mind, perhaps, the atomic mushroom cloud? This is followed by photographs of the city as it looked before the bomb, accompanied by the ominous, loud ticking of a clock. Displays illustrate events leading up to the bombing, the devastation afterward, Nagasaki's postwar restoration, the history of nuclear weapons, and the subsequent peace movement. Objects, photos, and artifacts graphically depict the bomb's devastation, including a clock stopped precisely at 11:02am, personal belongings ranging from mangled spectacles to a student's singed trousers, hand bones encased in a clump of melted glass, and photographs of victims, including a dead mother and her baby and a 14-year-old whose face has been hideously burned. On video, survivors describe their personal experiences on that fateful day. The museum is by no means pleasant, but something every concerned individual should see—plan on at least an hour here. (If, however, you've already seen the much larger Peace Memorial Museum in Hiroshima, this one will be largely repetitive.)

7–8 Hirano-machi. ☎ 095/844-1231. www1.city.nagasaki.nagasaki.jp/na-bomb/museum/museum.html. Admission ¥200 (\$1.65) adults, ¥100 (85¢) children. Daily 8:30am–5:30pm (until 6:30pm May–Aug). Streetcar: 1 or 3 to Hamaguchi-machi (5 min.).

TEMPLES, SHRINES & BRIDGES

Confucius Shrine and Museum of Chinese History (Koshibyō) ★ Chinese residents living in Nagasaki built this colorful, red-and-yellow shrine in 1893, aided by the Ch'ing Dynasty in China. This is the only Confucian shrine outside China built by the Chinese. In fact, the land upon which it stands belongs to China and is administered by the Chinese embassy in Tokyo. The main hall contains a statue of Confucius, attended by courtyard statues representing his 72 disciples. More fascinating, however, is the small Museum of Chinese History located behind the main hall with bronze jars, pottery, wooden food boxes, painted enamel vases, Buddha statues, and other treasures on loan from Beijing's National Museum of Chinese History and Beijing Palace's Museum of Historical Treasures. You can see everything in about 45 minutes.

10–36 Oura-machi. ☎ 095/824-4022. Admission ¥525 (\$4.35) adults, ¥420 (\$3.50) students, ¥315 (\$2.65) children. Daily 8:30am–5pm. Streetcar: Oura Tenshūdoshita (3 min.). Walk inland (continuing in the same direction of your streetcar if you're coming from downtown), and turn left when you reach a small playground on your right. Near the Dutch Slope.

Sofukuji Temple ★ Sofukuji is Nagasaki's most famous temple. Distinctly Chinese with its Ming architecture, it dates back to 1629, when it was founded by Chinese residents. Its Buddha Hall, painted a brilliant red and decorated with Chinese lanterns, was designed and cut in China before transportation to Nagasaki. Erected in 1646, it's the oldest building in Nagasaki and is a National Treasure. Another National Treasure is the temple's beautiful gate, which employs a complex jointing system and features brightly painted detailing. But most fascinating, in my opinion, is the temple's gigantic cauldron, built by a priest during a terrible famine in the 1680s to cook enough porridge to feed more than 3,000 people a day.

Kayjiya-machi. ☎ 095/823-2645. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) students, ¥100 (85¢) children. Daily 8am–5pm. A 7-min. walk from the Hamanomachi downtown shopping district. Streetcar: Shokakuji-shita (4 min.); head back toward the bay, turning right at Sofukuji St.

Spectacles Bridge (Megane-bashi) In addition to the temples described above, the Chinese also left their mark on Nagasaki with several bridges. Most famous is the so-called Spectacles Bridge, built in 1634 by a Chinese Zen priest. It's the oldest stone-arched bridge in Japan and is named after the reflection its two arches cast in the water; I wouldn't know, however, because I've never seen the Nakashima River larger than a trickle except once, when it rushed angrily after a heavy rain. The river does occasionally flood, though, as in 1982 when it wiped out several old bridges. The bridges were reconstructed, along with a promenade complete with benches and children's playgrounds. Since Megane-bashi is one of Nagasaki's most photographed objects and since it's only a 5-minute walk from the Hamanomachi shopping arcade, you might wish to come here with some takeout sushi and enjoy a picnic.

Streetcar: Nigiwai-bashi or Kokaidomae.

Suwa Shrine Although Nagasaki's famous Okunchi Festival has Chinese roots, it's celebrated at this Shinto shrine, built to promote Shintoism at a time when the feudal government was trying to stamp out Christianity. Today, with a good location on top of a hill with views over the city, the shrine symbolizes better than anything else the spiritual heart of the Japanese community. When Japanese women turn 33 and men turn 40, they come here to pray for good health and a long life. Newborns are brought 30 days after their birth to receive special blessings and then again for their 3rd, 5th, and 7th birthdays. On New Year's, the grounds are packed with those seeking good fortune in the coming year. People also visit to ask the shrine's many deities for favors—good marriage, safe childbirth, good health, and more. You can even have your automobile blessed here. The shrine sells fortunes in English. If you're satisfied with your fortune, keep it; if you're not, tie it to the branch of a tree and the fortune is conveniently negated.

18–15 Kami-Nishiyama. ☎ 095/824-0445. Free admission. Open 24 hr. Streetcar: Suwa Jinja-mae (4 min.); take the underground passage and follow the signs up many stone stairs.

CRUISING NAGASAKI'S HARBOR

If you're interested in seeing the results of Nagasaki's history as a trading port, take to the waters on one of two cruises (with commentary in English) offered daily from mid-March to December by the **Yasuda Jelly Fish Cruise** (☎ 095/821-0010). A 60-minute cruise, departing five times daily and costing ¥1,200 (\$10) for adults and ¥600 (\$5) for children, passes a fishing port, huge ships at moor and in dry dock, and the Mitsubishi shipyards, where battleships and cruisers are built and repaired. A 100-minute cruise departs once a day and costs ¥1,600 (\$13) for adults and ¥800 (\$6.65) for children. It covers the above sights

and also takes a spin around Battleship Island, developed by Mitsubishi in 1890 to exploit coral for energy use. Once home to 5,000 people but deserted since 1974, the concrete town stands eerily vacant and in disrepair (and would be an excellent setting for a thriller). If you wish, you can also partake of an all-you-can-eat buffet during the cruise, in which case you'll pay ¥2,700 (\$22) for adults and ¥1,700 (\$14) for children for the 60-minute cruise (but do you really want to eat that fast *and* see the sights?); the 100-minute cruise with buffet costs ¥3,500 (\$29) and ¥2,000 (\$17) respectively. Departures are from **Nagasaki Port Terminal** (a 5-min. walk from the Ohato streetcar stop), and reservations are a must; if you reserve 3 days in advance, you'll get a ¥300 (\$2.50) per-person discount.

A SIDE TRIP TO HUIS TEN BOSCH ★★

If you're ready for some R&R but only have 1 day to spare, perhaps **Huis Ten Bosch**, in Sasebo (☎ 0956/27-0001; www.huistenbosch.co.jp), will do the trick. This replica of a 17th-century Dutch village boasts tree-lined canals, brick houses, city squares, brick-paved roads, churches, museums, shops, restaurants, hotels, and even stately private homes—proof at how adept the Japanese are at imitation. Many of the buildings are faithful reproductions of originals back in the Netherlands; even the bricks were imported from Holland. Although I was a bit skeptical about visiting an imitation Dutch village in Japan, I must admit that the grounds and craftsmanship are beautifully done. Even Holland itself isn't this pristine. In fact, I consider this the country's premier theme park designed for adults. But although there are some rides and attractions, this is not an amusement park in disguise.

Highlights include **Paleis Huis Ten Bosch**, a replica of the formal residence of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, which contains an art gallery, period rooms showing how upper-class Dutch lived, a baroque garden, **porcelain** and **ornamental glass museums**, and **theaters** that re-create a ship's voyage from Holland to Japan in the 17th century and the flooding of a Dutch town. There are also cruises of Omura Bay and the village's canals; parades, dances, and other events daily; more than 60 shops; and more than 50 restaurants (including open-air beer and wine gardens and an e-mail cafe). The park is so vast that there are shuttle buses and other forms of transportation, but to really feel like you're in Holland, rent one of the park's bicycles.

A 1-day pass to Huis Ten Bosch costs ¥4,800 (\$40) for adults, ¥3,600 (\$30) for children 12 to 17, and ¥2,600 (\$22) for children 4 to 11 (under 3 go free). The best time to visit is spring, during—what else?—tulip season. Open March through November, daily 9am to 9:30pm (last entrance 8pm); December through February, 9am to 8:30pm (last entrance 7pm).

To reach Huis Ten Bosch, take the **JR Sea Side Liner Express** from Nagasaki Station to Huis Ten Bosch Station (1 hr. and 20 min.); the train departs every hour and costs ¥1,430 (\$12) one-way. Or take a **bus** from the Ken-ei Bus Terminal (across from Nagasaki Station) to Huis Ten Bosch (65 min.); there are more than 15 departures daily, and the cost is ¥1,350 (\$11) one-way.

Note: At press time, Huis Ten Bosch had declared bankruptcy but was still open and looking for a buyer; ask the folks at the Nagasaki tourist office about the current state of affairs before going out there.

WHERE TO STAY

Nagasaki has very reasonably priced hotels. Peak times, when a few accommodations may raise their rates, are Golden Week (Apr 29–May 5), Obon (mid-Aug), and the Okunchi Festival (Oct 7–9).

EXPENSIVE

Hotel New Nagasaki ★★ One of Nagasaki's deluxe hotels, the Hotel New Nagasaki has a convenient location right next to the train station. Its large, marbled lobby is light and airy, and its rooms are among the city's largest. Some even offer a view of Nagasaki's busy port, and most have been upgraded for Internet access. Add the hotel's wide range of facilities, and you have what amounts to one of Nagasaki's best choices.

14–5 Daikoku-machi, Nagasaki 850-0057. ☎ **095/826-8000**. Fax 095/823-2000. www.newotani.co.jp/en/directory/list_associate.htm. 149 units. ¥18,000 (\$150) single; ¥24,000 (\$200) double/twin; ¥26,000 (\$217) executive double/twin. AE, DC, MC, V.A 1-min. walk from Nagasaki Station to the right. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Western, 2 Japanese, Chinese); bar; lounge; well-equipped fitness club with indoor lap pool (and retractable roof) and sauna (fee: ¥2,000/\$17); concierge; art gallery; salon; room service (7am–10pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV with 40 channels for music and radio, dataport (not all rooms), minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Nagasaki Prince Hotel ★★ One of Nagasaki's finest hotels, the Prince's marbled lobby, decorated with large Oriental vases, centers on an indoor pond and has a distinct Asian flair. It also offers the convenience of a computer at the concierge desk with an Internet connection you can use for free. Rooms, which combine colonial-style decor with Chinese accents, offer the usual comforts; unique is the ladies-only wing with amenities geared toward female travelers and a women's lounge complete with sofas and free tea and coffee. There are only three single rooms in the hotel, though discounts are given for single use of twins and doubles. Regrettably, none of the rooms boast much of a view; for that you'll need to visit the 15th-floor Shanghai Sky Lounge with its panoramic vistas.

2–26 Takara-machi, Nagasaki 850-0045. ☎ **800/542-8686** in the U.S. and Canada or 095/821-1111. Fax 095/823-4309. www.princehotels.co.jp. 183 units. ¥15,000 (\$125) single; ¥24,000–¥29,000 (\$200–\$242) double or twin, ¥29,000–¥32,000 (\$242–\$267) executive twin or double. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: Takara-machi (1 min.). Or an 8-min. walk north of Nagasaki Station in the direction of Peace Park. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (Japanese, Chinese, steak/seafood, coffee shop); bar; lounge; beer garden in summer; Japanese roof garden; concierge; salon; room service (7am–11pm); in-room massage; babysitting; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV w/pay movies, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, large safe, washlet toilets.

②37 **Sakamoto-ya** ★★ *Finds* This beautiful 110-year-old ryokan (Nagasaki's oldest) right in the heart of the city is a wonderful place, especially when you consider how rare traditional ryokan are nowadays in major Japanese cities. Most of the rooms have a Japanese-style bathtub made of wood, as well as traditional artwork on the walls. The best room is the Pine Room (Matsu No Ma), which even has its own miniature garden with a tiny shrine. Rates vary according to the room and the meals served; you may order a *shippoku* dinner, a Nagasaki specialty consisting of a variety of dishes showing European and Chinese influences, for ¥3,500 (\$29) more. Western breakfasts are also served on request.

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide with an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in appendix C showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, **Sakamoto-ya** (above), refer to no. 237 in appendix C.

2–13 Kanaya-machi, Nagasaki 850-0037. ☎ 095/826-8211. Fax 095/825-5944. 17 units (10 with bathroom). ¥15,000–¥25,000 (\$125–\$208) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. A 10-min. walk southeast of Nagasaki Station. Turn right out of the station and follow the streetcar tracks south past the 1st streetcar stop; turn left after Nishi-Nihon Bank (just before the stoplight), walk up a slight incline, and turn left at the blinking light. The ryokan will be on your left. **Amenities:** In-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea.

MODERATE

Holiday Inn Nagasaki ★★ *Value* This hotel offers standard American convenience but with a rich mix of Asian and European design. Unlike most Holiday Inns, it keeps a low profile; it's hidden in the middle of a block and has a small, intimate lobby that resembles a rich merchant's home in old Nagasaki rather than a place to check in. As with all Holiday Inns, beds are at least double size (some are even queen-size or king-size). Note, however, that the cheapest singles face a wall .3m (1 ft.) away; if you're claustrophobic, specify a room with an outside view. One of the best things about this hotel is its convenient location, close to the Hamanomachi shopping arcade in the heart of the city and Chinatown. You can walk from the hotel to most sites, including Glover Mansion and Sofukuji and Kofukuji temples. Other pluses include its salon with Bali-influenced aromatherapy massages, a buffet restaurant specializing in seasonal organic dishes, and a helpful English-speaking front-desk staff.

6–24 Doza-machi, Nagasaki 850-0841. ☎ 800/HOLIDAY in the U.S. or 095/828-1234. Fax 095/828-0178. <http://hi-nagasaki.jp>. 90 units. ¥8,500–¥11,000 (\$71–\$92) single; ¥15,000–¥16,000 (\$129–\$133) double; ¥16,000–¥20,000 (\$133–\$167) twin. Children under 12 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1 to Kanko Dori (1 min.). The hotel is hidden behind a building; look for its sign. **Amenities:** Restaurant (international buffet); bar; salon; concierge; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Hotel Majestic ★★ The Majestic is a small, charming, quiet hotel. The beautifully appointed rooms are decorated in one of several themes—the country-living theme, for example, sports wooden floors, light-oak furnishings, and claw-foot bathtubs. All rooms have small balconies and larger-than-average bathrooms. There are no singles, the cheapest twins offer no views, and even more expensive rooms look out over a parking lot in addition to the bay. No matter. The best things about this getaway are its small size—which means no tour-bus groups in the lobby—and its great location near Glover Garden. Its tiny, cozy, European-style restaurant/bar will make you feel right at home.

2–28 Minami Yamate-machi, Nagasaki 850-0931. ☎ 095/827-7777. Fax 095/827-6112. 23 units. ¥23,000 (\$192) double; ¥19,000–¥27,000 (\$158–\$225) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1 to Tsukimachi, then no. 5 to Oura Tenshudo-shita (2 min.); cross the bridge and walk straight past the ANA Hotel Nagasaki Glover Hill. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

JR Kyushu Hotel Nagasaki You can't get closer to Nagasaki Station than this new business hotel on the station's second floor; those traveling with a Japan Rail Pass will also profit from a discount. Otherwise, rooms are your basic boxes, with alcoves serving as closets, small bathrooms which are pink (a bit hard to take in the morning) or beige, and no views. Those wishing to avoid any quality time in their rooms might take advantage of the station's shops and restaurants (the hotel's Royal Host coffee shop is also a good bet for breakfast).

1–1 Onoue-machi, Nagasaki 850-0058. ☎ 095/832-8000. Fax 095/832-8001. www.jrk-hotels.com/nagasaki. 144 units. ¥6,500 (\$54) single; ¥12,000 (\$100) twin. 10% discount with Japan Rail Pass. AE, DC, MC, V. **Amenities:** Restaurant (coffee shop); in-room massage; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Nagasaki Hotel Monterey ★ Step into old Portugal in this whimsical place complete with whitewashed walls, imported tiles, a small chapel with decorations imported from Portugal, and hand-painted furnishings. There's even a kerosene lamp museum on hotel premises, free to hotel guests. Popular with young women, the hotel fits the historic past of Nagasaki and is conveniently located at the bottom of Hollander Slope. Rooms, too, give hints of Portugal with their terra cotta-colored floor tiles and painted wood furniture. Although the cheapest singles have small bathrooms with no counter space, twins have lots of counter space. Only those rooms on the highest floors have views of the bay. 1–22 Oura-machi, Nagasaki 850-0918. ☎ **095/827-7111**. Fax 095/820-7017. 123 units. ¥8,500 – ¥12,000 (\$71–\$100) single; ¥18,000 – ¥22,000 (\$150–\$183) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: no. 1 to Tsukimachi, then no. 5 to Oura Kaigan Dori (1 min.); walk inland. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Italian, coffee shop); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service, nonsmoking rooms (singles only). *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

Hotel Wingport Nagasaki This clean and modern business hotel convenient to Nagasaki Station offers mostly singles that couldn't get much smaller. However, the fact that they're spotless, with white walls and cheerful bedspreads, helps alleviate claustrophobia, as do good bed lights. Panels close for complete darkness; note that some rooms face another building.

9–2 Daikoku-machi, Nagasaki 850-0057. ☎ **095/833-2800**. Fax 095/833-2801. 200 units. ¥5,800 (\$48) single; ¥8,000 (\$67) double; ¥7,000 – ¥12,000 (\$58–\$100) twin. DC, MC, V. Station: Nagasaki (2 min.); turn right out of the station, take the pedestrian bridge over both sets of streetcar tracks, and continue straight. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

(238) Minshuku Tanpopo *Value* This minshuku, a member of the Japanese Inn Group, is located north of Nagasaki Station on the east side of the Urakami River, about a 10-minute walk from Peace Park but somewhat inconvenient to the other city sights. However, it offers simple tatami rooms at very reasonable rates. The television in the communal dining room has bilingual programs.

21–7 Hoeicho, Nagasaki 852-8016. ☎ **095/861-6230**. Fax 095/864-0032. www3.ocn.ne.jp/~tanpopo7. 12 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,000 (\$33) single; ¥7,000 (\$58) twin; ¥9,000 (\$75) triple. Japanese breakfast ¥600 (\$5) extra; dinner ¥2,000 (\$17) extra. AE, V. Station: JR Urakami (15 min.). Take the pedestrian bridge over the river, turn right, turn left at the 3rd stoplight (there's a gas station on the corner), and then turn left again. Take the 1st immediate right. Streetcar: nos. 1 or 3 to Matsuyama (6 min.). Cross the river and turn left, turn right after 3 blocks (there's a gas station on the corner), take the 1st left and then the 1st immediate right. If you let the owners know you're coming and call from Urakami or Matsuyama station, they'll pick you up if they're not too busy. **Amenities:** Coin-op washer/dryer. *In room:* A/C, TV, LAN dataport, hot-water pot with tea.

(239) Pension Dejima-no-Ki This no-frills, five-story pension is conveniently located across the street from the Dejima Museum of History, within walking distance or an easy streetcar ride of the Hamanomachi shopping arcade and Glover Garden. Ms. Ano, the congenial owner, speaks English. Her Western rooms are basic and dormlike and come with minuscule bathrooms, but a plus is that every two rooms share a small balcony. Each floor has a fridge for communal use. Ask for a room on a higher floor facing Dejima.

10–16 Dejima-machi, Nagasaki 850-0862. ☎ **095/822-6833**. Fax 095/822-8197. ofumi@airos.ocn.ne.jp. 10 units. ¥6,000 (\$50) single; ¥10,000 (\$83) twin; ¥15,000 (\$125) triple. No credit cards. Streetcar: no. 1 to Tsukimachi (1 min.). Walk in the same direction as the streetcar (over a little bridge and then right); it will be on your right. **Amenities:** Pub (7–11pm). *In room:* A/C, TV, hair dryer.

WHERE TO DINE

Nagasaki's most famous food, called *shippoku*, is actually a whole meal of various courses with Chinese, European, and Japanese influences. It's a feast generally

shared by a group of four or more people and includes such dishes as fish soup, sashimi, and fried, boiled, and vinegared seasonal delicacies from land and sea. Another Nagasaki specialty is **champon**, a thick Chinese noodle usually served in soup with meat, seafood, and vegetables.

Nagasaki's nightlife district centers on a small street near Hamanomachi known as **Shianbashi Dori**, which begins just off the streetcar stop of the same name and is easily recognizable by the neon arch of a bridge and palm trees that stretches over the entrance of the street. Lined with pink plastic flowers, this street shimmers with the lights of various drinking establishments and yakitori-ya, which are often the cheapest places to go for a light dinner.

EXPENSIVE

(240) Kagetsu ★★ ★ *Finds* SHIPPOKU/KAISEKI If I were a woman of boundless means, this wonderful but expensive traditional restaurant is where I'd entertain all my friends—it's the ultimate Japanese dining experience serving constantly changing dishes. First established in 1618, Kagetsu is one of Japan's longest-running restaurants; the oldest part of the present wooden building is about 360 years old. This is an oasis of dignified old Japan, where kimono-clad waitresses shuffle down wooden corridors and serve guests sublime food in tatami rooms. Formerly a geisha house, it has separate stairways for patrons and hostesses. It even has a stone-floored room designed for a table and chairs where foreign patrons could be entertained. Display cases exhibit treasures related to Kagetsu's history.

Behind the restaurant, which is set back from the road, is a beautiful 300-year-old garden. I'll never forget my evening stroll here as a half-moon rose above gnarled, stunted pines. The back of the restaurant, consisting mainly of glass, was lit up, so I could see into a multitude of private tatami rooms all on different levels. It was like a woodblock print suddenly sprung to life. Needless to say, this restaurant is very popular and is sometimes entirely booked a full month in advance. There must be at least two of you if you want to feast on shippoku or kaiseki.

2-1 Maruyama-machi. ☎ **095/822-0191**. Reservations required at least a day (a week is better) in advance. Lunch obento (available only weekdays) ¥5,200 (\$43); shippoku or kaiseki set meal ¥11,000–¥20,000 (\$92–\$167). DC, V. Mon–Sat noon–8pm (last order). Closed some Sun and holidays. Streetcar: Shianbashi (3 min.). Head under the neon arch of a bridge onto Shianbashi Dori, continue straight, and then take the road between the cute Koban police box and the small park; it's straight ahead where the street ends, with the traditional gate.

MODERATE

(241) Gohan ★★ ★ ORIGINAL JAPANESE Gohan's English-speaking owner-chef, Tsunehiro Yoshimura, is also a musician, so you'll hear interesting music as you dine on creative, original meals here. The interior of this restaurant is authentically old; salvaged beams and pieces from five different houses were given new lives here. The handwritten menu changes daily, but the set dinner more than satisfies. Included may be sashimi, new potato with sesame seed, whole snapper, crayfish, tofu, soup, and rice. The dishes themselves are by Keisuke Iwata, a talented local potter of some renown. Hip waiters bring the food from an open kitchen. The whole experience is very highly recommended.

2-32 Aburayamachi. ☎ **095/825-3600**. Lunch teishoku ¥800 (\$6.65); obento ¥2,000–¥3,000 (\$17–\$25); set dinner ¥4,000–¥6,000 (\$33–\$50). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat noon–2pm and 5pm–midnight (last order 9:30pm). Closed holidays. Streetcar: Shokakujishita (1 min.). Walk 1 block down Sofukuji-dori toward the temple and take the 1st left; it's the 2nd building on your right with the name on the noren (short curtains hung outside a shop or restaurant to signify it is open)—look carefully, it's easy to miss.

Harbin 🌟🌟🌟 FRENCH/RUSSIAN Established in 1959, Harbin is a Nagasaki tradition, one of those places you don't want to miss. Its owner was born in Manchuria and named his restaurant after Harbin, a town close to his birthplace that was once an international city of Russian, Chinese, and Japanese residents. His family-run restaurant serves a unique blend of French and Russian cuisine; in recent years, his French-trained chef son has brought his own interpretations to the menu.

On the ground floor is an all-day cafe/bar, while upstairs is the more formal restaurant (open for dinner only). Both have appropriate decor—lots of dark, polished wood and red furnishings. The changing menu, written in Japanese, English, and Russian, may include chicken liver stroganoff, fried chicken Kiev style, Georgian spicy lamb pot, and duck steak in plum sauce. The *coulbiac* (traditional Russian salmon pie), when available, is perhaps the best thing on the menu. The ¥900 (\$7.50) set lunch consists of *borsch* (beet soup), three kinds of *piroshki* (stuffed, savory pastries), salad, and coffee or tea.

Harbin operates a second cafe in the Kanko-dori covered shopping arcade, on the third block from the Kanko-dori streetcar stop (☎ 095/824-6650; open Mon–Sat 11:30am–midnight).

2–27 Kozen-machi. ☎ 095/822-7443. Main dishes ¥2,200–¥3,500 (\$18–\$29); set dinner ¥3,000–¥8,000 (\$25–\$67); set lunch ¥900–¥1,500 (\$7.50–\$13). AE, DC, MC, V. Cafe Mon–Sat 10am–1am; restaurant 6–8:30pm (last order). Streetcar: Sakura-machi (3 min.). Walk uphill (to the right if coming from the direction of Nagasaki Station) and turn right onto City Hall Street; it's just past the JAL office on the right.

Obinata 🌟🌟 Finds ITALIAN One of my favorite restaurants, Obinata is an oasis of old Europe in the heart of Kyushu. The place has a warm, earthy feel to it, due perhaps to its heavy wooden beams, large bouquets of flowers, oil wick lamps on each table, scattered antiques, and classical music playing softly in the background. The atmosphere is cozy and the service is a delight. The menu, in Italian, lists such dishes as beef filet grilled with crushed black pepper with cream sauce; veal and ham served with wine sauce; risotto; spaghetti; lasagna; and pizza, all served with fresh, homemade bread. Dishes are creative and fun. Expect to pay about ¥6,000 (\$50) if you go all out and order an appetizer, main dish, and wine (there's a wide selection of Bordeaux, Moselle, and Rhine wines—the owner is a wine buff), but you can eat more cheaply if you stick to the pastas.

3–19 Funadaiku-machi. ☎ 095/826-1437. Pastas and main dishes ¥1,000–¥5,000 (\$8.35–\$42); pizza ¥1,000–¥1,800 (\$8.35–\$15). AE. Mon–Sat 5–11pm (last order). Streetcar: Shianbashi (3 min.). Walk under the neon-lit arch of a bridge onto Shianbashi Dori and turn right at the Fukusaya castella cake shop (an old traditional building); it will be almost immediately on your left—look for the sign.

Shikairo 🌟🌟 CHAMPON If you're interested in eating champion (a thick Chinese noodle usually served in soup with meat, seafood, and vegetables), this is the Chinese restaurant that claims to have invented them. First opened in 1899, it occupies a five-story modern building, with hints of Chinese-influenced architecture, not far from Glover Garden. Stop first at the free museum, where displays depict the history of the restaurant and objects relating to champion. Then, unless you have reserved a private room, take the elevator to the fifth floor, where you will be treated to great harbor views and delicious food. The menu offers many dishes in addition to champion, including sweet-and-sour pork and braised shrimp in chili.

4–5 Matsugae-machi. ☎ 095/822-1296. Main dishes ¥600–¥1,300 (\$5–\$11); set lunch ¥1,400 (\$12); set dinner ¥3,000–¥10,000 (\$25–\$83). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 5–8pm (last order). Streetcar: Oura Tenshodoshita (1 min.).

②42 **Shippoku Hamakatsu** SHIPPOKU This modern restaurant, just a minute's walk from the Hamanomachi covered shopping arcade, is one of Nagasaki's best known shippoku restaurants. The ground floor, with Western-style table seating, is made private with alcoves and bamboo screens; upstairs is a large tatami room with individual low tables (you sit on cushions). It offers a shippoku set meal for lone diners for both lunch (¥2,000/\$17) and dinner (¥2,900/\$24), making it a good place to try this unique cuisine if you're alone. Other set meals from ¥3,800 (\$32) per person can only be ordered for parties of two or more.

6–50 Kajiya-machi. ☎ 095/826-8321. Set lunch ¥1,000–¥2,000 (\$8.35–\$17); dinner shippoku set meal ¥2,900–¥12,000 (\$24–\$100). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–8:30pm (last order). Streetcar: Shianbashi (4 min.). Walk under the arch with the clock and take the 2nd right (Lawson is on the corner); it's in the middle of the block on the left.

Tokiwa SASHIMI/TEMPURA/KAISEKI Raw fish doesn't come any fresher than at this conveniently located restaurant between Hamanomachi and Glover Garden. Tokiwa features a wooden counter surrounding a large pool filled with live fish; when its number is up, the fish is scooped out of the water and then prepared right before your very eyes. Sometimes the fish is gutted and filleted with only the head, heart, and skeleton left intact, so that the sashimi can be arranged around the alive and still-quivering creature and be delivered to your table. Barring that, you might opt for one of the lunch *teishoku* (set meals), which range from sashimi to tempura.

Nagasaki View Hotel, 2–3 Oura-machi. ☎ 095/824-2211. Set lunch ¥980–¥2,500 (\$8.15–\$21); set dinner ¥2,000–¥8,000 (\$17–\$67). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9:30pm (last order). Streetcar: Ourakaigan Dori (1 min.); across the street from the stop, but entrance is around the back.

INEXPENSIVE

In addition to the restaurants below, a good place for inexpensive fare is the newly developed **Dejima Wharf**, a complex of restaurants, bars, and shops along a boardwalk located near the Dejima historic district and Dejima streetcar stop.

Hortensia INTERNATIONAL This buffet restaurant is located on the second floor of the Park Side Hotel in the leafy green area of Peace Park and next to the Atomic Bomb Museum, making it a good choice if you're in the area. Lunch (available until 2pm) features an all-you-can-eat buffet of Chinese, Western, and Japanese fare, including chicken with herbs, curry rice, fried shrimp, macaroni and cheese, and more; or you can order a la carte. In the evenings, set meals are offered for dinner, except during the summer months (June–Aug) when the restaurant transforms itself into a beer garden (in spirit only, as it's indoors), with buffet spreads costing ¥2,000 (\$17), or all you can eat and drink ¥3,500 (\$29).

Park Side Hotel, 14–1 Heiwa-machi. ☎ 095/845-3191. Main dishes ¥800–¥1,200 (\$6.65–\$10); lunch buffet ¥1,200 (\$10); set dinner ¥3,800–¥8,000 (\$25–\$67). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–9pm. Streetcar: Hamaguchi-machi (3 min.).

Sobaya SOBA NOODLES Gohan's Yoshimura (see “Gohan,” above) also owns this inexpensive soba shop, located in a tiny, picturesque alleyway reminiscent of old Japan. It's the only place in Nagasaki offering homemade soba (buckwheat noodles), the most expensive of which comes with tempura. An obento lunch and set dinners that might include duck or fish either grilled or raw are also available.

1–3 Yoroyuza. ☎ 095/823-8530. Soba ¥600–¥1,500 (\$5–\$13); obento lunch box ¥700 (\$5.85); set dinner ¥3,000–¥5,000 (\$25–\$42). AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–3pm and 5–9pm. Closed holidays. Streetcar: Nigiwaibashi (1 min.). Look carefully for a white lantern near a sporting goods store on the street parallel to and east of the river near the Spectacles Bridge.

8 Unzen Spa & Its Hells (☆☆)

66km (41 miles) SE of Nagasaki

Unzen Spa is a small hot-spring resort town located 690m (2,300 ft.) above sea level in the pine-covered hills of the Shimabara Peninsula. Thanks to its high altitude, cool mountain air, great scenery, and hot sulfur springs, Unzen became popular in the 1890s as a summer resort for American and European visitors, who came from as far away as Shanghai, Hong Kong, Harbin, and Singapore to escape the oppressively humid summers. They arrived in Unzen by bamboo palanquin from Obama, 11km (6¾ miles) away. (The fact that there were foreigners here explains why Unzen has one of Japan's oldest golf courses, dating from 1913.) In 1911, Unzen became the first prefectural park in Japan. In 1934, the area became **Unzen-Amakusa National Park** (☆☆), one of the nation's first national parks; it covers 264 sq. km (102 sq. miles).

I like Unzen Spa because it's small and navigable. It consists basically of just a few streets with hotels and ryokan spread along them, a welcome relief if you've been spending hectic weeks rushing through big cities and catching buses and trains. Only 1,200 people live here, and from the town a number of hiking paths wind into the tree-covered hills. Dense clouds of steam arise from solfataras (vents) and fumaroles, evidence of volcanic activity. For visitors, the best result of all that thermal activity is the abundance of hot springs: Unzen's name derives from "Onsen," meaning "hot spring."

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The easiest way to get to Unzen is by **Ken-ei Bus** from Nagasaki. Buses leave every hour or more frequently from the Ken-ei Bus Terminal across the street from Nagasaki Station. The ride takes about 2 hours and costs ¥1,900 (\$16) one-way or ¥3,420 (\$29) round-trip. For bus and train schedules, drop by the Nagasaki Prefecture Tourist Federation on the second floor of the Ken-ei Bus Terminal.

VISITOR INFORMATION Before leaving Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai international airports, be sure to stop by the Tourist Information Center to pick up the free leaflet "Nagasaki and Unzen," which describes places of interest in Unzen and the Shimabara Peninsula. In Nagasaki, stop by the **Nagasaki Prefectural Tourist Federation**, across from Nagasaki Station on the second floor of the Ken-ei Bus Terminal.

In Unzen, the **Tourist Information Center**, 320 Unzen, Obamacho Minami Takaki-gun 854-0621 (☎ 0957/73-3434; open daily 9am–5pm), is located in the heart of Unzen Spa next to the Unzen Spa House and across from the police station (between the Nishi-Iriguchi and Shin-yu Visitor Center-mae bus stops). It has a good map in English of Unzen and the surrounding area. Nearby is the park's **Unzen Visitor's Center** (☎ 0957/73-2642; open Fri–Wed 9am–6pm, to 5pm in winter), with information on the national park.

GETTING AROUND Buses from Nagasaki make four stops in Unzen Spa, terminating at Unzen's Ken-ei Bus Center. I've provided the bus-stop name for accommodations so you can alight at the nearest stop. Otherwise, Unzen is so small you can walk from one end to the other in about 30 minutes.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

When the area around Unzen Spa was designated a national park in 1934, it was named after what was thought to be an extinct volcanic chain, collectively called

Mount Unzen. In 1991, however, a peak in Mount Unzen—Mount Fugen—erupted for the first time in almost 200 years, killing several dozen people on its eastern slope and leaving behind a huge lava dome. Unzen Spa, on the opposite side, was untouched and remains the area's most popular resort town.

THE HELLS (JIGOKU) Unzen Spa literally bubbles with activity, as sulfurous hot springs erupt into surface cauldrons of scalding water in an area known as the Hells (Jigoku). Indeed, in the 1600s, these cauldrons were used for hellish punishment, as some 30 Christians were boiled alive here after Christianity was outlawed in Japan. Today, Unzen Spa has more than 30 solfataras and fumaroles, with the Hells providing the greatest show of geothermal activity, making this spot Unzen's number one attraction. It's a favorite hangout of huge black ravens, and the barren land has been baked a chalky white through the centuries. Pathways lead through the hot-spring Hells, where sulfur vapors rise thickly to veil pine trees on surrounding hills. A simple cross erected on stones serves as a memorial to the Christians killed here.

CLIMBING MOUNT FUGEN ♡ If you feel like taking an excursion, head for Mount Fugen, Unzen's most popular destination outside Unzen Spa. Buses depart about six times a day for **Nitta Pass**, about a 20-minute ride away (fare: ¥740/\$6.15). From Nitta Pass, you can take a 3-minute ropeway (cable car) for ¥1,220 (\$10) round-trip to go up higher to **Mount Myoken**, which at 1,280m (4,265 ft.) offers spectacular panoramic views. But the best thing to do, in my opinion, is to skip the ropeway and take the footpath that runs from the bus stop and skirts the mountain along a tree-shaded path. It will take you about 30 minutes to walk to Mount Myoken, and that's all you may care to exert yourself. If you're ready for some real climbing, however, continue along a marked path for another hour or so; it leads starkly uphill to the summit of **Mount Fugen**, once Unzen's highest peak at 1,339m (4,462 ft.) above sea level—this is the peak that erupted in 1991. Here, on a clear day, you'll be rewarded with splendid views of other volcanic peaks as far away as Mount Aso in the middle of Kyushu. You can also see Mount Heisei Shinzan (the lava dome), born during Mount Fugen's last eruption and now Unzen's loftiest peak at 1,463m (4,875 ft.). Allow at least 2½ hours for the hike from Nitta Pass to Mount Fugen and back so you don't miss the last bus.

TAKING THE WATERS On the main street of Unzen are the Finger Spa and the Foot Spa, where you can soak the appropriate appendages in outdoor baths for free. If you'd like to get more than your feet wet (though all accommodations below offer hot-spring baths), the **Unzen Spa House**, across from the Unzen Kanko Hotel (☎ 0957/73-3268; www7.ocn.ne.jp/~unzenspa), is open daily 10am to 6:30pm. Indoor cypress baths and rotenburo (outdoor hot-spring baths) cost ¥800 (\$6.65); for an additional ¥700 (\$5.85), you can try the sand baths.

HITTING THE LINKS You can play golf at Japan's oldest public golf course (☎ 0957/73-3368; open daily 8am–5pm), a 5-minute taxi ride from Unzen Spa. The total charge for 18 holes—including greens fees, tax, and caddy—is ¥8,630 to ¥10,200 (\$72–\$85) on weekdays depending on the season, and ¥11,430 to ¥13,010 (\$96–\$108) on weekends and holidays. A shorter par 3, 9-hole course (good for beginners) costs ¥3,150 (\$26) on weekdays, ¥3,680 (\$31) on weekends and holidays.

WHERE TO STAY

Keep in mind that, as with most resort areas in Japan, Unzen tends to be crowded and sometimes even fully booked during Golden Week, during New Year's, and from mid-July to August. The best times of year are late April to June,

when the azalea bushes are in glorious bloom, and late October and early November, when the maple leaves turn brilliant reds.

With the exception of the inexpensive accommodations at the end of this section, all the ryokan and hotels listed here are within an easy walk of bus stops along the route traversed by the bus from Nagasaki. I've included the bus stops for each establishment below. You can also tell the bus driver where you're staying, and he'll drop you off at the nearest stop.

EXPENSIVE

Kyushu Hotel ★★ Despite its name, the Kyushu Hotel, built in 1917, is a lovely, old-style ryokan in an updated building with a view of a lovely traditional garden from its luxurious lobby. Yet it remains in step with the times, attracting young Japanese with a gracious and accommodating staff (the 3rd-generation owners speak English), soft jazz playing in public places, and fusion cuisine in the dining hall that successfully blends Western and Japanese styles. If you prefer, you can opt for Japanese cuisine served in your room. But best of all, the Kyushu Hotel offers some of the most scenic views in town—many of its rooms boast great views of the hills as well as the Hells. Tatami rooms feature alcoves with Western-style chairs next to large windows, affording relaxing places to take in the view. There are also a few Western-style rooms and combination rooms with tatami areas and beds. The communal baths are spacious and inviting, but if you don't care to bathe with everyone, reserve the private family bath (there's a 40-min. time limit).

320 Unzen, Obamacho, Minami-Takaki-gun 854-0697. ☎ 0957/73-3234. Fax 0957/73-3733. qshuhtl@gold.ocn.ne.jp. 97 units. ¥15,000 – ¥40,000 (\$125–\$360) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: Shin-yu Visitor Center-mae (2 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western fusion); bar; lounge; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths with great views of the Hells; aromatherapy massage (¥8,000/\$67); sauna; souvenir shop; gallery; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, satellite TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

②43 **Miyazaki Ryokan** ★★ One of the largest Japanese inns in Unzen, this modern ryokan, with traditional service, overlooks a beautiful, gracefully manicured garden with hills and sulfur vapors rising in the background—absolutely exquisite when the azaleas are in bloom. Upon arrival, you'll be served green tea and sweets by graceful women in kimono. Afterward, you'll want to ease into the large, marble hot-spring bath overlooking a rock-lined outdoor bath, separated for men and women. Or, if you're shy about bathing with others or want to make it a family affair, make a reservation at no extra charge for the private family bath (40-min. time limit). After bathing, relax in the peaceful tatami area with Go (a Japanese board game) tables, huge flower arrangements, and a dispenser of cool *mugi cha* (wheat tea). Next comes one of the best reasons to stay here—the kaiseki meal. Although breakfast (Western style, if desired) is served in a communal dining area, an excellent dinner is served in your guest room in true ryokan fashion. In addition to Japanese-style tatami rooms, there are combination rooms with twin beds and a separate tatami area. Since rates are the same regardless of which direction the rooms face, I advise securing one that looks out over the garden or, barring that, the Hells (views from here are not as good, however, as from the Kyushu Hotel above).

320 Unzen, Obamacho, Minami-Takaki-gun 854-0621. ☎ 0957/73-3331. Fax 0957/73-2313. www.miyazaki-ryokan.co.jp. 183 units. ¥18,000 – ¥33,000 (\$150–\$275) per person. ¥2,000 (\$17) extra per person Sat and nights before holidays. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: Shin-yu Visitor Center-mae (2 min.). **Amenities:** Lounge; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; Jacuzzi; sauna; in-room massage; shopping arcade; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, tiny safe, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Unzen Kanko Hotel ★★☆☆ *Finds* If you're the least bit romantic, you won't be able to resist staying at this old-fashioned mountain lodge, built in 1935 of stone and wood, covered in ivy, and resembling a Swiss chalet. No wonder it's been designated an Important Tangible Cultural Heritage Site. The lobby, main dining hall, and public spaces have changed little over the decades, with their white-washed walls, dark-beamed ceilings, and inviting sofas and chairs. The rooms are rustic and old-fashioned, too, with heavy ceiling-to-floor curtains tied back to reveal a balcony, brass doorsills, a high ceiling, and wooden beams. There are 48 Western-style rooms, eight Japanese-style tatami rooms, and two combination rooms that come with both a bed and tatami area.

320 Unzen, Obamacho, Minami-Takaki-gun 854-0621. ☎ 0957/73-3263. Fax 0957/73-3419. www.unzenkankohotel.com. 58 units. ¥8,500–¥10,000 (\$71–\$83) single; ¥12,000–¥16,000 (\$100–\$133) double; ¥14,000–¥22,000 (\$117–\$183) twin; ¥25,000–¥45,000 (\$208–\$375) Japanese-style rooms; ¥22,000 (\$183) combination rooms. AE, DC, MC, V. Bus: Nishi-Iriguchi (1 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western); bar; hot-springs baths (including a family bath; get the key at reception); game room; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

INEXPENSIVE

②44 **Kaseya Ryokan** Located on the main street through town not far from the bus center (the last stop on buses into town), this economically priced ryokan dates back to 1909 but has been remodeled. The kind owners are fond of children; they have three of their own and remembered Janie's daughter 10 years later. All of the rooms are Japanese-style, simply decorated but with high ceilings and flower arrangements. Ask for a room in the back—they're quieter. A small shop in the lobby sells blue-and-white tie-dyed clothing, a massage chair is available free of charge, and a computer provides high-speed Internet connection (¥100/85¢ for 10 min.). Coffee is free in the mornings, and Western-style breakfasts are available. If you call to let them know you've arrived, they'll pick you up from the visitor center.

Unzen, Obamacho, Minami-Takaki-gun 854-0621. ☎ 0957/73-3321. Fax 0957/73-3322. www.kaseya.jp. 13 units (none with bathroom). ¥6,800 (\$57) per person Sun–Fri; ¥7,980 (\$67) per person Sat and nights before holidays; more during Golden Week and New Year's. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, MC, V. Bus: Jinja-mae (2 min.). **Amenities:** Hot-spring baths (including a private one for families); in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

②45 **Seiunso Kokumin Shukusha** *Value* Formerly a youth hostel, this public lodging underwent extensive remodeling and now offers as much comfort and as many facilities as a moderately priced resort hotel. Rooms are Japanese style; most have a small balcony offering views of the surrounding woods, and all have sinks and toilets. There are also three combination rooms with both beds and tatami areas that are quite spacious, are accessible to travelers with disabilities, and have the best views; you can stay in these rooms for the same charge if they're not booked. Needless to say, you should reserve early to stay here. The main disadvantage is that the location is outside Unzen, about a 30-minute walk from the Hells.

500–1 Unzen, Obamacho, Minami Takaki-gun 854-0621. ☎ 0957/73-3273. Fax 0957/73-2698. 63 units (none with bathroom). ¥4,500 (\$38) per person. ¥900 (\$7.50) extra for buffet breakfast; ¥2,000–¥4,000 (\$17–\$33) for dinner. No credit cards. Bus: Nishi-Iriguchi (20 min.). Pickup service available from Ken-ei Bus Center. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (both Japanese); tennis courts; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths with a relaxation room; playground; game center; in-room massage; free washer/dryer; same-day laundry/dry-clean service. *In room:* AC, TV, hot-water pot with tea, safe, washlet toilet.

WHERE TO DINE

Even if you don't stay at the **Unzen Kanko Hotel**, you may want to come here for lunch. Its old-fashioned dining hall is large with wooden paneling and wooden floors, white tablecloths, and flowers on each table. It serves both Japanese and Western selections, with set lunches beginning at ¥1,800 (\$15) and Japanese obento priced at ¥2,000 (\$17). A la carte items include filet mignon and lobster or inexpensive spaghetti. Western dinners start at ¥5,000 (\$42). The dining hall is open for lunch from noon to 1:30pm and for dinner starting at 6pm, with last orders taken at 8pm.

Unzen Tabi no Beer Kan WESTERN This microbrewery brews three different kinds of beer. A half liter costs ¥700 (\$5.85), or you can have a sampler of all three for ¥750 (\$6.25). For dining, a buffet is served daily from 11am to 3pm; there's all-you-can-eat (in 90 min.) shabu-shabu or yakiniku; and a limited a la carte menu offers snacks ranging from curry rice to fried chicken. The dining hall is light and airy with large windows overlooking the wooded hills, and the music is German beer-drinking music.

Across from the Ken-ei Bus Center. ☎ 0957/73-3113. Main dishes ¥500–¥1,000 (\$4.15–\$8.35); buffet lunch ¥1,500 (\$13); all-you-can-eat shabu-shabu or yakiniku ¥1,800 (\$15). AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–8pm. Bus: Ken-ei Bus Center (1 min.).

Northeastern Honshu—Tohoku

Because so many of Japan's historic events took place in Kyoto, Tokyo, and other cities in southern Honshu, most visitors to Japan never venture farther north than Tokyo. True, northeastern Honshu (called the Tohoku District) does not have the famous temples, shrines, gardens, and castles of southern Japan, but it does have spectacular mountain scenery, national parks, hot springs in abundance, excellent ski resorts, and many hiking trails. Its rugged, mountainous terrain, coupled with cold, snowy winters, has also helped preserve the region's traditions. You won't find any of Tokyo's edgy flashiness here, but rather a down-to-earth practicality, warm hospitality, and a way of life that harks back generations.

Matsushima, about 3 hours north of Tokyo, is considered one of Japan's most scenic spots, with pine-covered islets dotting its bay. Farther north, near the middle of Tohoku, is the pleasant village of **Kakunodate**, once a thriving castle town and famous for its remaining samurai houses and cherry trees. Occupying 862 sq. km (333 sq. miles) of northern Tohoku is the resplendent **Towada-Hachimantai National Park**, best visited for its scenic lakes, rustic hot-spring spas that seem little changed over the decades, skiing, and hiking, including a trail that flanks the picture-perfect Oirase Stream. And after a day of trekking or skiing, what can be better than a soothing, hot-spring soak?

TOHOKU ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE & AROUND Northern Tohoku's major airports are in Aomori and Akita, with fares from Tokyo's Haneda Airport costing ¥25,500 (\$212) and ¥20,500 (\$171) respectively. You can also travel to Tohoku via **Shinkansen** bullet train from Ueno or Tokyo Station in Tokyo as far as Akita, with stops at Kakunodate and Tazawako, a convenient springboard for travel onward to Towada-Hachimantai National Park.

Although there is bus service in the national park, frequency of buses to some of the more remote areas is infrequent or nonexistent. For that reason, Tohoku is one of the few regions in Japan where **rental cars** are a great convenience, if not a necessity. In addition to car-rental agencies at both Aomori and Akita airports, there are JR Eki Rent-A-Car offices at train stations throughout Japan, including Aomori, Morioka, Kakunodate, and Tazawako stations, which offer 20% discounts for train fares booked in conjunction with car rentals. You'll also find Toyota Rent-A-Car offices virtually everywhere. If you want to keep your driving to a minimum, I suggest taking a Shinkansen as far as Tazawako and renting a car from there. You could then visit nearby Kakunodate, Lake Tazawa, and Nyuto Onsen before continuing northward to Lake Towada. A 2-day rental of a subcompact car costs about ¥18,500 (\$154), including mileage and insurance. Drop-off fees can add ¥4,000 (\$33). Keep in mind that Tohoku's winter season, from November to March, can bring below-freezing temperatures and up to a

foot of snowfall virtually overnight. Some mountain passes are occasionally closed due to snowfall, though access to major ski resorts is generally open.

See “Getting Around Japan,” in chapter 2 for more information on renting a car in Japan. Contact information for rental agencies in Tohoku is provided under individual destination listings below.

1 The Pine-Clad Islands of Matsushima

375km (234 miles) NE of Tokyo

Because the trip to northern Tohoku or onward to Hokkaido is such a long one, the most pleasant way to travel is to break up the journey with an overnight stay in **Matsushima** . Matsushima means “Pine-Clad Islands”—and that’s exactly what this region is. More than 260 pine-covered islets and islands dot Matsushima Bay, giving it the appearance of a giant pond in a Japanese landscape garden where twisted and gnarled pines sweep upward from volcanic tuff and white sandstone, creating bizarre and beautiful shapes.

Matsushima is so dear to Japanese hearts that it’s considered one of the three most scenic spots in Japan (the other two are Miyajima in Hiroshima Bay and Amanohashidate on the north coast of Honshu)—and was so designated about 270 years ago in a book written by a Confucian philosopher of the Edo government. Basho (1644–94), the famous Japanese haiku poet, was so struck by Matsushima’s beauty that it’s almost as though he were at a loss for words when he wrote: “Matsu-shima, Ah! Matsushima! Matsushima!”

Unfortunately, motorboats have been invented since Basho’s time, detracting from the beauty that evoked such ecstasy in him long ago.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Tokyo, you can take the **Tohoku Shinkansen** train from Ueno or Tokyo Station to Sendai, which will take from 1½ to 2¼ hours, depending on the number of stops. In Sendai, change to the **JR Senseki Line**—it’s well marked in English, so you shouldn’t have any difficulty changing trains. From Sendai, the trip to **Matsushima Kaigan Station** takes about 25 minutes by express train and costs ¥400 (\$3.35); trains depart approximately every half-hour.

A more picturesque way to get to Matsushima is to take the Senseki Line from Sendai only as far as **Hon-Shiogama** (about 18 min. by express), where you can catch a **sightseeing boat** operated by the Matsushima Bay Sightseeing Ferry Co. (☎ 022/366-5111) for a 50-minute trip to **Matsushima Kaigan Pier**; tickets cost ¥1,420 (\$12) for adults and ¥710 (\$6) for children. Although commentary is in Japanese only, an English pamphlet describing more than you’d ever want to know about the islets you’re passing is available. You’ll also pass the unsightly Tohoku Thermal Electric Power Station, which the pamphlet says was built in such a way “as not to distract from Matsushima Bay’s beauty, but rather harmonize with it.” I don’t even have to tell you my thoughts on this. Boats depart from both Hon-Shiogama and Matsushima Kaigan piers about every half-hour between 8am and 4pm, but only once an hour between 9am and 3pm December through March. From Hon-Shiogama Station, it’s about a 10-minute walk to the boat pier; take a right out of the station, cross the street, turn right at the first red light (crossing under the tracks), and continue straight on.

VISITOR INFORMATION Upon your arrival in Matsushima, stop off at one of the two **Matsushima Tourist Association offices**, where you can pick up a brochure with a map in English and get directions to your hotel. One is located

to the right as you exit **Matsushima Kaigan Station** (☎ 022/354-2263; open daily 10am–4:30pm). The staff here speaks English and will help you with reservations for lodgings in Matsushima.

Adjoining the tourist office is a left-luggage counter, useful if you're making a quick stopover (there are also lockers in Sendai Station).

If you're arriving in Matsushima by boat, you'll find another information booth at **Matsushima Kaigan Pier** (☎ 022/354-2618; open daily 8:30am–5pm, to 4:30pm in winter). **Note:** This office does not arrange accommodations.

Although information is limited, you can search for more on the Web at www.pref.miyagi.jp.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND **Matsushima Kaigan Station** lies to the west of the boat pier and Matsushima's main attractions; the train station and pier are about a 6-minute walk apart. All of Matsushima's major attractions are within walking distance of both the station and the pier (though the pier is more centrally located); you can cover the whole area on foot in a half day of leisurely sightseeing.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

CRUISING THE BAY Arriving in Matsushima by **sightseeing boat** is a good introduction to the bay because you'll pass pine-covered islands and oyster rafts along the way. Board the boat in Hon-Shiogama for the 50-minute trip to Matsushima Kaigan Pier (see "Getting There," above).

If you come by train or even if you arrive by boat, you might want to take a **boat trip** in the bay. Regular sightseeing boats depart from the pier once an hour between 9am and 4pm, making 50-minute trips around the bay; they charge ¥1,400 (\$12) for adults, half price for children.

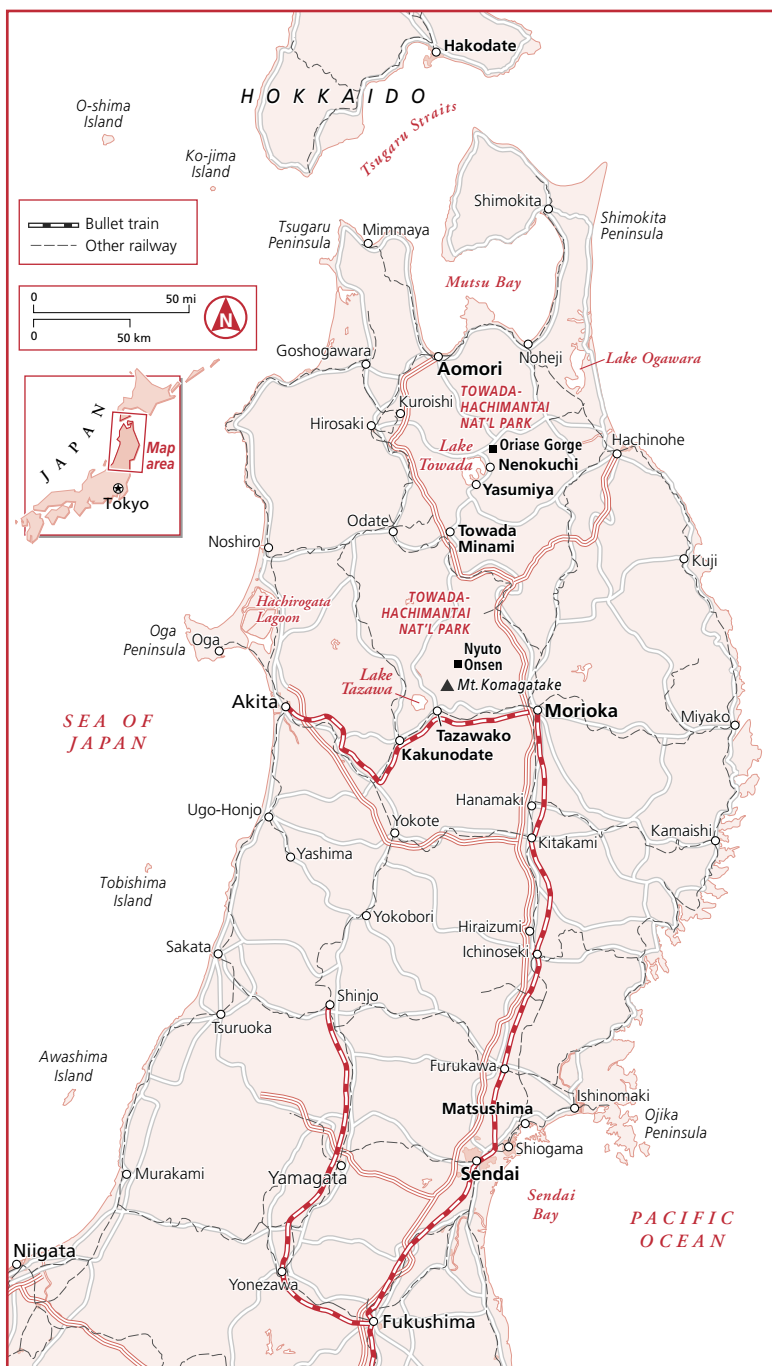
TEMPLES & HISTORIC BUILDINGS

(246) **Zuiganji Temple** ★★☆☆ Matsushima's best-known structure is the most famous Zen temple in northern Japan. Located just a few minutes' walk away from Matsushima Kaigan Pier and 7 minutes from the train station, its entrance is shaded by tall cedar trees. On the right side of the pathway leading to the temple are caves and grottoes dug out by priests long ago; adorned with Buddhist statues and memorial tablets, they were used for practicing Zazen (sitting meditation) and are an impressive sight. Here, too, you'll find what is probably Japan's only monument to—eels!

Now a National Treasure and the highlight of a stay in Matsushima, Zuiganji Temple was originally founded in the Heian Period (828) as a Tendai temple but became a Zen temple in the 13th century. After a period of decline, it was remodeled in 1604 by order of Date Masamune, the most powerful and important lord of northern Honshu. Unifying the region known as Tohoku, Date built his castle in nearby Sendai, and today almost all sites in and around Sendai and Matsushima are tied to the Date family. It took hundreds of workers 6 years to build the impressive main hall, a large wooden structure that was constructed in the shoin-zukuri style typical of the Momoyama Period; the hall originally served as the family temple of the Date clan. Be sure to walk around the temple for a better look at its gorgeous, gold-plated sliding doors.

The **Homotsuden** houses the **Zuiganji Art Museum (Seiryuden)** with its displays of temple and Date family treasures, including painted sliding doors, portraits of the Date clan, tea cups, scrolls, calligraphy, and woodblock prints, many of Matsushima as it looked in former times, shown on a rotating basis. In all, you'll probably spend an hour at Zuiganji Temple.

Northeastern Honshu—Tohoku



Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many hotels, restaurants, attractions, and other establishments in Japan do not have signs giving their names in Roman (English-language) letters. Appendix C lists the Japanese symbols for all such places described in this guide. Each set of characters representing an establishment name has a number in the appendix that corresponds to the number that appears inside the oval before the establishment's name in the text. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, **Entsuin** (below), refer to no. 247 in appendix C.

Under the supervision of Zuiganji Temple is **Godaido**, a small wooden worship hall on a tiny island not far from the pier. Connected to the mainland by a short bridge, its grounds are open night and day and are free, but there's not much to see other than the bay. Nevertheless, Godaido is often featured in brochures of Matsushima, making this delicate wooden temple one of the town's best-known landmarks.

91 Aza-chonai. ☎ 022/354-2023. Admission for both Seiryuden and Zuiganji Temple ¥700 (\$5.85) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) children. Daily 8am to between 3:30 and 5pm, depending on the month.

247 Entsuin ★★ *Finds* This lesser-known temple was also built in the early Edo Period, more than 340 years ago, by the Date clan. It features a small rock garden (with seven rocks representing the Seven Deities of Good Fortune), a moss garden with six different types of moss, a lovely rose garden, an Edo-Period garden with a pond and “borrowed landscaping,” and a small temple housing an elaborate statue of Lord Date Mitsumune, grandson of Lord Date Masamune, who founded the Sendai fief. Depicted here on a white steed, Mitsumune was reportedly poisoned by the Tokugawa shogunate and died at the tender age of 19 in Edo Castle. The seven statues surrounding him represent retainers who committed ritual suicide to follow their master into death. The interior walls are all covered with an overlay of gold. The painting of an occidental rose on the right-hand door is thought to be the first in Japan (hence the rose garden); other Western flowers include narcissus and corona. Be on the lookout for “hidden” crosses above the door that are slanted; because Christianity was banned in Edo Japan, the Date clan used crosses as a symbol for silent revolt. Expect to spend about 45 minutes here.

67 Aza-chonai. ☎ 022/354-3206. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) high-school students, ¥100 (85¢) children. Daily 8am–5pm. Next to Zuiganji Temple (to the left as you face it).

Kanrantei Another famous structure is Kanrantei, the “Water-Viewing Pavilion,” just a 1-minute walk from the boat pier. A simple wooden teahouse, it was used by generations of the Date family for such aesthetic pursuits as viewing the moon and watching the ripples on the tide. Originally it belonged to warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi as part of his estate at Fushimi Castle near Kyoto, but he presented it to the Date family at the end of the 16th century; it was moved here in 1645, where it remains one of the largest teahouses in Japan.

For an additional ¥300 (\$2.50), you can drink ceremonial green tea while sitting on the teahouse tatami and contemplating the bay, its islands, and the boats carving ribbons through the water. After tea, wander through the small museum containing samurai armor, ceramics, lacquerware, and tea-ceremony utensils belonging to the Date family.

56-1 Aza-chonai. ☎ 022/353-3355. Admission ¥200 (\$1.65) adults, ¥150 (\$1.25) university and high-school students, ¥100 (85¢) children. Daily 8:30am–5pm (to 4:30pm in winter).

MUSEUMS

248 Michinoku Date Masamune Historical Museum (Michinoku Date Masamune Rekishikan) ★ This wax museum details the life and times of Masamune (1567–1636) through 25 life-size, audio-visual diorama displays. Showing everything from how Masamune lost sight in one of his eyes at age 5, to his marriage at age 13, to his victories in battle, the dioramas bring to life what might otherwise be dull history. At the very least, you get to see how people dressed back then and learn why Masamune was nicknamed the One-Eyed Dragon. Of less interest are some wax figures of early-19th- and 20th-century personalities of northern Japan; be sure to ask for the English pamphlet, since otherwise you won't know who the heck they are. Plan on spending an hour here.

Matsushima Kaigan. ☎ 022/354-4131. Admission ¥1,000 (\$8.35) adults, ¥600 (\$5) junior-high and high-school students, ¥500 (\$4.15) children. Daily 8:30am–5pm, to 4:30pm in winter. Across from the Godaido Temple and set back from the main street.

Matsushima Orgel Museum ★★ This is a museum within a museum: It displays the entire Belgium National Music Box Museum, which was bought and shipped lock, stock, and barrel from Bruges, Belgium. The 100 or so music boxes, dating from 1860 to 1950, are priceless. Some were owned by kings; others were designed for theaters, exhibitions, dance halls, cafes, or train stations and are quite huge and elaborate. The largest in the collection (and one of the largest in the world) boasts 619 wooden pipes, drums, trumpets, and xylophones. There are also phonographs, player pianos, harmoniums dating back to 1905, and other early inventions (including a 1900 Ediphone). Best of all, some of the music boxes are played on request. You can easily spend 45 minutes here.

33–3 Funendo. ☎ 022/353-3600. Admission ¥1,000 (\$8.35) adults, ¥700 (\$5.85) junior-high and high-school students, ¥500 (\$4.15) children. Daily 9am–5:30pm, to 5pm in winter. Station: Matsushima Kaigan (15 min.). On the main road, an 8-min. walk from the pier.

ISLANDS

On the southern edge of Matsushima, about an 8-minute walk from Matsushima Kaigan Station, is **Oshima** (also spelled Ojima), a small island once used as a retreat by priests. At one time, there used to be more than 100 hand-dug caves carved with scriptures, Buddhist images, and sutras, but today the island and its remaining 50 caves and stone images are rather neglected. There's no fee, there's no gate, and the island never closes. Connected to the mainland by bridge, it's a nice quiet spot in which to sit and view the harbor; you can walk around the entire island in about 20 minutes. Because it was a Buddhist retreat, women were forbidden on the island until after the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

At the other end of Matsushima, about a 10-minute walk from the boat pier, is **Fukuurajima**, another island connected to the mainland, this time by a long red concrete bridge with orange-colored railings. It's a botanical garden of sorts, with several hundred labeled plants and trees, but mostly it's unkempt and overgrown—which comes as a surprise in cultivated Japan. It will take you less than an hour to walk completely around the island, and there are many resting spots along the way, including a snack shop selling ice cream and drinks. Between 8am and 6pm (4pm in winter), you must pay ¥200 (\$1.65) admission (half price for children), but it's free the rest of the time.

WHERE TO STAY

Because this is a popular tourist destination, accommodations in Matsushima are not cheap, especially during the peak months of May through November. For the Tanabata Festival (Aug 6–8 in Sendai) and the Toronagashi Festival (Aug

15–16 in Matsushima), rooms are usually fully booked 6 months in advance and rates are at their highest. Rates are generally lower during the off-season months (Dec–Apr).

Almost all accommodations here are in ryokan, which means you're generally expected to take your dinner and breakfast in them.

Directions are given from the boat pier or train station, whichever is closer. The pier and station are about a 6-minute walk apart.

EXPENSIVE

(249) Hotel Ichinobo ★★ Despite its large size, modern facilities, and the word “hotel” in its name, this property has the atmosphere of a traditional ryokan and offers mostly Japanese-style rooms. It's surrounded by pine trees and boasts lovely landscaped grounds and ponds, with views of the sea and islands. However, its location on the northern edge of Matsushima—about a 20-minute walk from the pier—is inconvenient, though there is an infrequent free shuttle service to both the pier and train station several times every morning (and the hotel will pick you up from either of these places when you arrive in town, if you let them know when you're coming). A huge plus is that all rooms overlook the bay; the more expensive rooms overlook the beautiful garden as well. Rooms, 10 of which are singles and 7 twins, are comfortable and come equipped with wet bars, perfect for entertaining. Even the bathroom areas boast two sinks. Kaiseki dinners and buffet breakfasts are served in a dining room. The wonderful public baths have views of the bay.

Matsushima Kaigan, Matsushima-cho, Miyagi-gun 981-0215. ☎ **022/353-3333**. Fax 022/353-3339. m_yoyaku@ichinobo.com. 126 units. ¥18,000–¥25,000 (\$150–\$208) per person. ¥3,000 (\$25) extra per person weekends and holidays. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Free shuttle from Matsushima Kaigan Station or Matsushima Kaigan Pier; call for pickup. **Amenities:** Restaurant (kaiseki); bar; outdoor pool (free for hotel guests); public indoor and outdoor baths; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; glass museum (10% discount for hotel guests). *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Matsushima Century Hotel ★ This white hotel, near Fukuurajima island, is popular with families. I recommend taking a Japanese-style room or a combination room with both tatami area and beds, as these all face the bay with a balcony and chairs. Otherwise, if you're on a budget, the Western-style rooms, though sunny and cheerful, face inland and have no balconies, but they have the cheapest rates given below. Meals are served in a restaurant; breakfast is an all-you-can-eat buffet.

8 Aza Senzui, Matsushima-cho, Miyagi-gun 981-0213. ☎ **022/354-4111**. Fax 022/354-4191. 135 units. ¥14,000–¥20,000 (\$117–\$167) per person in summer; ¥13,000–¥19,000 (\$108–\$158) per person in winter. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. A 5-min. walk east of the pier. Call for a pickup from the station or pier. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (both Japanese); coffee shop; outdoor pool (free for hotel guests); public baths (with sauna) overlooking the bay; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe (in Japanese-style rooms only).

(250) Taikanso ★★ Able to accommodate 1,100 guests, Matsushima's largest hotel sprawls atop a plateau surrounded by pine-covered hills and offers the best view in town. To compensate for its isolation, a free shuttle bus operates between the hotel and Matsushima Kaigan Station every 30 minutes. Both Western- and Japanese-style rooms are available, though the cheapest rooms (singles and twins) face inland. All the Japanese-style rooms face the sea, including wonderful combination rooms (the most expensive), which offer the best of both worlds with tatami areas, beds, bedside controls for curtains and lights, and wall-to-wall windows offering great views. A plus here is that you can choose from six restaurants

to dine in, with rates dependent on the meal and restaurant. One of the least expensive is one of my favorites: Shiosai (p. 566), which has the best view in town of both Matsushima Bay and the surrounding hills. The front desk is very helpful with sightseeing information in English.

10–76 Aza Inuta, Matsushima-cho, Miyagi-gun 981-0213. ☎ 022/354-2161. Fax 022/353-3431. www.taikanso.co.jp. 256 units. ¥9,800–¥21,000 (\$82–\$175) per person. ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra in peak season. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Matsushima Kaigan (20 min.). A free shuttle bus also meets trains at the station. **Amenities:** 7 restaurants and bars; outdoor pool (free for hotel guests); indoor and outdoor public baths overlooking the island-studded bay; game room; souvenir and amenities shop; room service (8pm–midnight); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

Folkloro Matsushima *Value* Opened in 1999, this modern, simple budget hotel with Western-style rooms is located on a hill above the train station and has a nice outdoor terrace where you can have breakfast (dinner is not available). Catering mostly to couples and families, it offers only twins and larger units; some family rooms, with two twin beds and two sofa beds, have views of the sea. Note that *yukata* (cotton robes) are not standard here, but you can rent one for ¥100 (85¢).

17 Sanjukari, Matsushima Aza, Matsushima-cho, Miyagi-gun 981-0213. ☎ 022/353-3535. Fax 022/353-3588. 29 units. Peak season ¥13,000 (\$108) twin; family room: ¥16,000 (\$133) for 2, ¥19,000 (\$158) for 3, and ¥22,000 (\$183) for 4. Regular season ¥12,000 (\$100) twin; family room ¥14,000 (\$117) for 2, ¥17,000 (\$142) for 3, and ¥20,000 (\$167) for 4. Rates include breakfast. No credit cards. Station: Matsushima Kaigan (10 min.). Take a right out of the station, then another right under the tracks, and continue straight up the hill; the hotel will be on your left. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

Hotel Daimatsuso Although this is an older, slightly worn hotel, with a lobby whose souvenir shop and vending machines make it seem crowded, it's homey nonetheless. The Daimatsuso also has the advantage of being close to the train station. It offers Japanese-style rooms that face the sea with balconies. Best are those on the fifth floor, some of which are combination rooms with beds and tatami areas. The cheapest rooms (both Japanese- and Western-style) have no bathrooms and look unceremoniously onto another building next door; this is where you'll probably end up if you opt for a room without meals. Rooms come with the basics, though some of the built-in bathroom units are so small you have to wonder how some people fit into them. If you take your meals here, dinner will be served in your room, while breakfast is served communally in the ground-floor dining room.

25 Azachonai, Matsushima-cho, Miyagi-gun 981-0213. ☎ 022/354-3601. Fax 022/354-6154. 41 units (4 with toilet only, 29 with bathroom). ¥7,000–¥8,000 (\$58–\$67) per person without meals; ¥8,000–¥15,000 (\$67–\$125) per person with 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Matsushima Kaigan (1 min.). Walk straight out of the station; the hotel will be on your left. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

②51 **Ryokan Kozakura** This 25-year-old ryokan is very simple but serves delicious and generous Japanese meals in your tatami room. The owners are friendly but don't speak much English. One drawback to the place is that it's on the main truck route; if you're a light sleeper, request a room at the back.

13–7 Aza Fugendo, Matsushima-cho, Miyagi-gun 981-0213. ☎ 022/354-2518. Fax 022/354-5353. 12 units (4 with bathroom). ¥4,000–¥6,000 (\$33–\$50) per person without meals; ¥7,000–¥15,000 (\$58–\$125) per person with 2 meals. Winter discounts available. No credit cards. A 5-min. walk from the pier. Take a right onto the main street and continue past the 3rd signal; the ryokan is just past a sake shop, on the left. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

In summer, stalls up and down the main street of Matsushima sell grilled octopus, corn on the cob, and crab.

(252) Donjiki Chaya NOODLES/ODANGO This rustic noodle shop is a convenient place for a light, inexpensive lunch if you're visiting Zuiganji and Entsuin temples. Built about 400 years ago, it's easy to spot because of its thatched roof, with sliding doors pushed wide open in summer and tatami seating. In addition to buckwheat noodles, it also serves *odango*—pounded rice balls covered with sesame, red-bean, or soy sauce for ¥450 (\$3.75). There's a menu in English.

Entsuin-mae, Matsushima. ☎ 022/354-5855. Noodles ¥350–¥500 (\$2.90–\$4.15). No credit cards. Apr–Nov daily 9am–5pm; Dec–Mar Sat–Sun and holidays 9am–4pm. In front of Entsuin Temple, a 5-min. walk from Matsushima Kaigan Station or the pier.

Shiosai ★★ *Value* FRENCH Located atop a hill, this restaurant has the best view in town. Book a table at sunset close to the floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking Matsushima, where you can watch the day fade and lights in the town below begin to glimmer. Only set meals are available, but they're very good and surprisingly inexpensive. My ¥2,300 (\$19) dinner consisted of soup, lobster ravioli and grilled fish, salad, bread, dessert, and coffee or tea. It's a good place for a romantic meal on a budget. Or, from 2:30 to 4pm, come for dessert and coffee or the local Matsushima Brewing Company beer and enjoy the view.

Taikanso Hotel, 7th floor, 10–76 Aza Inuta. ☎ 022/354-2161. Set lunch ¥1,600–¥5,000 (\$13–\$42); set dinner ¥2,300–¥5,000 (\$19–\$42). Daily 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–8:30pm (last order). For directions, see "Where to Stay," above.

Ungai ★ *Finds* BUDDHIST VEGETARIAN Located on the grounds of Entsuin Temple, this is a great place for a peaceful meal, as you dine in a modern tatami room and look out over a garden. It serves three set meals typical of Buddhist vegetarian cuisine (which features many small dishes with vegetables and tofu that change with the seasons); let your budget be your guide.

Entsuin Temple, 67 Aza-chonai. ☎ 022/353-2626. Reservations required 1 day in advance. Set meal ¥3,500 (\$29), ¥5,000 (\$42), and ¥7,000 (\$58). No credit cards. Daily 11am–2pm. Next to Zuiganji Temple (Entsuin Temple is to the left when facing Zuiganji Temple; the restaurant is to the right after entering Entsuin).

2 Kakunodate, Town of Samurai Homes ★

Kakunodate was founded in 1620 by feudal lord Ashina Yoshikatsu, who chose the site for its river and easily defended mountain. His samurai retainers settled just south of his hilltop castle, in modest thatched-roof homes behind wooden fences along wide, fine streets, which they lined with weeping cherry trees imported from Kyoto. To help support themselves, the samurai engaged in cottage industry, crafting beautiful products made from cherry bark. Meanwhile, merchants settled in their own district, in narrow, cramped quarters. Many of the town's 14,600 residents are direct descendants of the town's original samurai and merchants.

Although the castle is long gone, Kakunodate's castle-town architectural layout remains remarkably intact, with one of the country's best-preserved (though regrettably small) samurai districts in Japan. It's also famous for its cherry trees, not only in the samurai district but along the banks of the Hinokinai River, and crafts produced from local cherry bark are still famous throughout Japan. Yet Kakunodate is an unpretentious village, with only a few of the souvenir and tourist shops that plague other picturesque towns.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Tokyo, take the **Tohoku Shinkansen train** from Ueno or Tokyo Station to Morioka and then the **Akita Shinkansen** to Kakunodate. (You can travel via some Shinkansen the entire distance without having to transfer in Morioka.) The trip takes about 3½ hours and costs ¥14,980 (\$125) for an unreserved seat. Kakunodate is just one stop after Tazawako. (See “Towada-Hachimantai National Park: For the Active Traveler,” below.)

VISITOR INFORMATION After you exit Kakunodate Station, look for the **Kakunodate Tourist Information Center** to the right, housed in a replica of a traditional warehouse (☎ **0187/54-2700**; open daily 9am–5:30pm). There you can pick up an English-language map.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND You can walk to all the sights and lodging and dining recommendations below (though you might opt for a short taxi ride to your accommodations if you're weighed down by luggage). To reach the samurai district, about a 15- to 20-minute walk from the station, walk straight out of the station and continue until it ends at a T-intersection (you'll see a post office across the street; this is the former merchant district and the heart of the city). Here, you turn right.

CAR RENTALS If you've rented a car through **JR Eki Rent-A-Car** (☎ **0187/53-2070**), you can pick it up at Folkloro Kakunodate, a JR-owned hotel beside the train station to the left. For **Toyota Rent-A-Car** in Kakunodate, call ☎ **0187/55-2100**.

SEEING THE SIGHTS

Kakunodate is at its most glorious (and crowded) in late April, when its hundreds of cherry trees are in full bloom. The most popular viewing spot is along the Hinokinai River, where two rows of some 400 cherry trees form a shimmering tunnel of blossoms for 2km (1¼ miles). They were planted in 1933 to commemorate the birth of the present emperor, Akihito.

THE SAMURAI DISTRICT (BUKEYASHIKI) ★★ Of Kakunodate's 80-some samurai mansions built during the Edo Period, only six remain. Still, the district retains its feudal atmosphere to an amazing degree, thanks to its wide streets flanked by weeping cherry trees and dark wooden fences. These fences and traditional entry gates are employed even today to conceal more modern homes, giving a clean, crisp line of vision throughout the district. It's a strong contrast to the jumble of most Japanese cities, and even to the merchant district just a short walk away.

If you're walking from the station, stop first at the (253) **Aoyagi Samurai Manor (Kakunodate Rekishi-mura Aoyagi)** ★★, Higashi Katuraku-cho 26 (☎ **0187/54-3257**), to the right through an impressive entry gate. Its English name is misleading, since it's actually a compound of several traditional buildings spread throughout a garden, each filled with a wealth of eclectic treasures from the 17th to 20th centuries; all of them were collected through the ages by the Aoyagi family. As you wander through the buildings, you'll see samurai armor, rifles, swords, dolls, kimono, sake cups, Ukiyo-e (woodblock prints), scrolls and screens, Meiji-Era uniforms and medals, farm tools, a great collection of album covers (from Billie Holiday to Karajan conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra), antique phonographs, and cameras. One building serves as a fascinating antiques store (with high prices), while others hold a gift shop and a restaurant. You'll want to spend at least an hour exploring here. Open daily 9am

to 5pm (to 4pm in winter). Admission is ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults, ¥300 (\$2.50) for junior-high and high-school students, and ¥200 (\$1.65) for children.

Next door is the **Ishiguro Samurai House** ★★, Omotemachi (㊦ 0187/55-1496). In contrast to the Aoyagi Samurai Manor, this thatched-roof home remains almost exactly as it might have looked when it was constructed 200 years ago by the Ishiguro samurai family. After the Meiji Restoration, the family became landlords and collected rice as rent. Today, English-speaking, 12th-generation Ishiguro Naotsugi continues to live here; he has opened five simple but elegant rooms to the public in the main house. Family heirlooms, including samurai gear, winter *geta* (fur-lined and with spikes), scales for weighing rice, and old maps of Kakunodate are on display in a former warehouse. The medical illustrations (copies), by the way, are from Japan's first book on anatomy, copied from a Dutch book in 1774 by Kakunodate samurai Odano Naotake. You can see everything in less than 30 minutes, though if Ishiguro-san is on hand to answer questions, you might linger longer. Open daily 9am to 5pm. Admission is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults and ¥150 (\$1.25) for children.

SHOPPING

Kakunodate has been famous for its cherry-bark crafts since the Edo Period. You can observe this painstaking craft by watching the artisans at work at the (254) **Kakunodate-machi Denshokan**, Omotemachi Shimochō 10-1 (㊦ 0187/54-1700), just a couple minutes' walk from the samurai houses, above. In addition to seeing how strips of cherry bark are applied to tea canisters, boxes, vases, and other crafts, you can tour a small museum devoted to the craft, and shop for cherry-bark products in its large shop. Admission to the denshokan is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults and ¥150 (\$1.25) for children. It's open daily 9am to 5pm (to 4:30pm in winter).

There's a smaller shop outlet of the denshokan at the train station, open daily 9am to 6pm.

WHERE TO STAY

Although you can easily tour Kakunodate's sights in a day, I've included a few accommodations in case you're arriving from Tokyo or seeking respite in a small town. Keep in mind that you should book well ahead if you hope to stay here during peak seasons: cherry-blossom season (roughly end of Apr through beginning of May) and summer holidays (mid-July through Aug).

Folkloro Kakunodate No English is spoken at this JR-affiliated hotel, but its location next to Kakunodate Station and its simple but clean, modern, and inexpensive Western-style rooms make it a logical choice for a 1-night stopover. Only two types of rooms are available: 11 twins and 15 family rooms that sleep up to four. Note, however, that the family rooms seem cramped for four but are roomy for two.

Iwaseihaza, Nakasuga-sawa 14, Kakunodate, Akita. ㊦ 0187/53-2070. Fax 0187/53-2118. 26 units. Peak season ¥14,000 (\$117) twin; family room ¥17,000 (\$142) for 2, ¥20,000 (\$167) for 3, and ¥22,000 (\$192) for 4. Regular season ¥12,000 (\$100) twin; family room ¥14,000 (\$117) for 2, ¥17,000 (\$142) for 3, and ¥20,000 (\$167) for 4. Rates include breakfast. AE, MC, V. To the left after you exit the train station. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western food); car-rental agency; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

(255) **Ishikawa Ryokan** One of Kakunodate's oldest ryokan, open since the Edo Period and now in its fifth generation of innkeepers, this establishment has been modernized though it is a bit drab in parts. Although corridors suggest the

ordinary, the Japanese-style rooms are fine, simple but with nice wood details. And the elderly couple running the ryokan, every bit as self-effacing as their ancestors must have been to traveling samurai and other high officials, couldn't be nicer (though they don't speak English). Meals are served in your room.

Iwamasemachi 32, Kakunodate, Akita. ☎ **0187/54-2030**. 11 units (2 with bathroom, 1 with toilet only). ¥9,000 – ¥18,000 (\$75–\$150) per person. Rates include 2 meals and tax. No credit cards. A 12-min. walk from the station. Walk straight out of the train station and turn left at the 4th street (1 block before the T intersection); the ryokan will be on your right. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea.

256 Tamachi Bukeyashiki Hotel ★★ *Finds* This delightful hotel is deceiving—it looks as though it has been here since the Edo Period, with its whitewashed walls, open wooden beams, and rustic ambience. Built in 1999, it combines tradition with modern comfort, with gleaming wood floors, contemporary Japanese art, and Japanese- and Western-style rooms that exude class, from sensuously curving paper lampshades to ceramic tissue holders. Breakfast is served in an adjoining tatami restaurant. In short, this small, intimate establishment is a perfect choice for experiencing Kakunodate's relaxed, small-town charm.

Tamachi Shimocho 23, Kakunodate, Akita. ☎ **0187/52-1700**. Fax 0187/52-1701. 12 units. ¥13,000 (\$108) per person. Rates include 2 meals. Winter discounts available. V.A 12-min. walk from the station. Walk straight out of the train station and turn left at the 3rd street; the hotel will be a couple blocks down, on your right. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese). *In room:* A/C, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

WHERE TO DINE

In addition to the choice here, a simple dining room at the Aoyagi Samurai Manor, called **Inaniwa Korai Udon** (☎ **0187/52-8015**), offers noodle dishes priced under ¥1,000 (\$8.15), including tempura soba and sansai udon (noodles with mountain vegetables).

257 Nishinomiya ★ **VARIED JAPANESE** This pleasant and inexpensive restaurant is located in the family compound of the Nishinomiya clan, a samurai family that later became merchants and built the main house and five warehouses that are on display today. The restaurant is in a warehouse dating from 1919 and offers a limited menu of fried seafood, noodles, beef hash with rice, and other dishes. Best, perhaps, is to order one of the obento lunch boxes. After your meal, be sure to wander through the other warehouses, including a small museum housing family treasures and a crafts shop.

Tamachi Kami-cho 11–1. ☎ **0187/52-2438**. Obento ¥1,500 – ¥2,000 (\$13–\$17). V. Daily 10am–6pm. Station: Kakunodate (8 min.). Walk straight out of the train station and turn left at the 3rd street; the restaurant will be almost immediately on your right.

3 Towada-Hachimantai National Park: For the Active Traveler

Towada-Hachimantai National Park, spreading 862 sq. km (333 sq. miles) through north-central Tohoku and shared by three prefectures, is blessed with mountain ranges, lakes, streams, and hot-spring spas. It's perfect for the outdoor enthusiast, offering hiking in summer and skiing in winter. Most easily accessible from Tokyo is **Lake Tazawa** at the southern end of the park, with its nearby ski lifts, hot-springs, and biking and hiking opportunities. Far to the north, and a good choice if you're heading onward to Hokkaido, are the pristine **Lake Towada** and delightful **Oirase Stream** with its riverbank hiking trail.

Unfortunately, bus service through Towada-Hachimantai National Park is either infrequent or nonexistent. There is, for example, no bus that connects lakes Tazawa and Towada, so you either have to choose which one to visit, or

make a long, circuitous journey by bus and train. If you want to see both, your best bet is to rent a car.

LAKE TAZAWA, NYUTO ONSEN & MOUNT KOMAGATAKE

Lake Tazawa (Tazawako) has the distinction of being the deepest lake in Japan, 423m (1,387 ft.) deep. Crystal clear, it offers swimming as well as cycling along its rim. Nearby are several ski resorts, as well as the Nyuto Onsen rustic hot-spring spas at the base of Mount Nyuto that make good bases for exploring the area. Mount Komagatake is a popular destination for trekkers.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Tokyo, take the **Tohoku Shinkansen train** from Ueno or Tokyo Station to Morioka and then the **Akita Shinkansen** to Tazawako Station. (You can travel via some Shinkansen the entire distance without having to transfer in Morioka.) The trip takes about 3 hours and costs ¥14,190 (\$118) for an unreserved seat. Tazawako is one stop before Kakunodate (see the “Kakunodate, Town of Samurai Homes” section above). In Tazawako you can board a bus to all the recommendations below, including Nyuto Onsen.

VISITOR INFORMATION For information on Lake Tazawa and vicinity, including skiing and bus schedules throughout the region, stop by the **Tazawako Tourist Information Center** inside Tazawako Station (☎ 0187/43-2111; open daily 8:30am–6:30pm).

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND The town of Tazawako, in Akita Prefecture, is the transportation launching pad for visiting the southern region of Towada-Hachimantai National Park. **Buses** depart from the Tazawako Bus Terminal across from Tazawako Station for Lake Tazawa, area ski resorts, Mount Komagatake, and Nyuto Onsen hot-spring spas. Ask for bus schedules at the Tazawako Tourist Information Center.

Lake Tazawa is just a 15-minute bus ride from Tazawako Station; note that some buses stopping here go onward to Tazawako Skijo ski resort, Kogen Onsen, and Nyuto Onsen, all of which lie northeast of the lake. Otherwise, a bus departs Tazawako Station approximately every hour for Tazawako Skijo (a 30-min. ride), Kogen Onsen (37 min.), and Nyuto Onsen (45 min.)

CAR RENTALS Tazawako is a good starting point for driving excursions through Towado-Hachimantai National Park. **JR Eki Rent-A-Car** (☎ 0187/43-1081) is located beside Tazawako Station. For **Toyota Rent-A-Car** in Tazawako, call ☎ 0187/43-2100.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

SWIMMING & CYCLING AT LAKE TAZAWA Just 20km (13 miles) in circumference, Lake Tazawa is popular for its small swimming beach a couple minutes' walk from Tazawako Kohan bus stop. Outside the swimming season—mid-July through August—you'll find nary a soul there. You can rent bikes at the lake for ¥400 (\$3.35) per hour. It takes about 2 hours to ride around the lake; unfortunately, you have to share the road with vehicular traffic, but because this is a popular cycling route, motorists know to keep a lookout. (Still, it may be prudent to avoid weekends and the mid-July-through-August vacation crunch.) Except for one small stretch, the road is mostly flat (it may be easier to circle the lake counterclockwise); it is pleasantly wooded and relatively unspoiled. Along the way you'll pass a golden statue of the legendary Princess Tatsuko, a nymphlike beauty just off the shoreline.

Finally, sightseeing boats (which go past little other than the water and surrounding wooded hills) operate on Lake Tazawa from late April to early November; a 40-minute trip costs ¥1,170 (\$9.75).

Laka Tazawa is a 15-minute bus ride from Tazawako Station. Many buses travel the route—the name of the bus stop at the Lake is called Tazawako Kohan—and the fare is ¥350 (\$2.90).

SKIING Of several area ski resorts, largest is **Tazawako Skijo** (☎ 0187/46-2011), with nine lifts. A 1-day lift ticket costs ¥3,200 (\$27). Ski-equipment rental costs ¥7,000 (\$58) for everything; snowboarding is also available. Buses from Tazawako Station (traveling in the direction of Nyuto Onsen) reach Tazawako Skijo in about 30 minutes and cost ¥580 (\$4.85).

Smaller, with four lifts, is nearby **Tazawakokougen Assl Skijo** (☎ 0187/46-2723). **Nyuto Skijo** (☎ 0187/46-2244), in Nyuto Onsen, has only one lift and is recommended for beginners.

CLIMBING MOUNT KOMAGATAKE Visible from Lake Tazawa, Akita Prefecture's tallest mountain is actually a 1,611m (5,370-ft.) high dormant volcano. It's a popular destination for hikers, though a bus that deposits hikers at the 8th Station makes it a fairly quick hike—you can reach the top in about 1½ hours. At the peak, you're rewarded with grand vistas of the surrounding mountains, as well as more hiking trails. Since the path is steep at times, wear non-slip soles. (All the Japanese will be outfitted in regulation hiking regalia.) To reach Mount Komagatake's 8th Station, take a bus from Tazawako Station 37 minutes to Kogen Onsen, transferring there for a 25-minute ride to the 8th station. (A few buses a day travel from Tazawako Station all the way to the 8th Station.) The fare from Tazawako Station is ¥810 (\$6.75), from Kogen Onsen ¥410 (\$3.40).

Tip: If you rent a car, you can drive all the way to the 8th Station, though access is severely restricted. During peak season, you have to drive up before 6am (you'd be astounded by the number of people who do).

WHERE TO STAY

By far the best place to stay in this region is **Nyuto Onsen**, with its seven hot springs. In contrast to most onsen, which consist of ryokan clustered in a village or town, Nyuto Onsen is centered on an isolated, winding country road, with a handful of rustic, secluded ryokan scattered along its length. Unsurprisingly, access is a problem if you don't have a car, though there are some nine buses a day from Tazawako Station that travel the Nyuto Onsen road; the bus ride takes 45 to 50 minutes and costs ¥740 (\$6.15).

②58 **Kuroyu** ★★ Although I'm partial to Tsuru-no-yu (see below), some consider this Nyuto Onsen's best place to stay. A little more than 1km (a half-mile or a 20-min. walk) from the main Nyuto Onsen road, this rustic inn has a secluded location and one of the area's best outdoor baths, separated for men and women and with good views of the surrounding mountainside. Although first opened as a ryokan more than 60 years ago, its present thatched-roof accommodations were constructed in the 1990s, with small, very simple tatami rooms. Clearly, what draws most of the retirees who flock here are the baths. Meals are served in a communal dining room.

2-1 Kuroyu, Tazawako-machi, Senboku-gun, Akita 014-1201. ☎ 0187/46-2214. Fax 0187/46-2280. 20 units (none with bathroom). ¥11,700 (\$98) per person. Rates include 2 meals, tax, and service charge. Closed Nov–Apr. No credit cards. Bus: From Tazawako Station, 50 min. to Kuroyu bus stop and then a 20-min. walk; a few buses a day go directly to the inn (ask for a schedule). **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths. **In room:** Hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

(259) Qkamura National Park Resort Village (Kyukamura Tazawako-Kogen) This government-owned public lodging offers the convenience of being on Nyuto Onsen's main road (buses from Tazawako Station stop right outside). While it lacks the wonderful ambience of the other rustic inns in the area and has about as much charm as a dormitory, it was recently renovated and offers both indoor and outdoor hot-spring baths. In addition, it's the only place to stay if you prefer Western-style rooms, though Japanese tatami rooms are also available. Rooms are simple but pleasant, with sinks and toilets (three Western-style rooms have bathrooms). If you stay here, you can still sample the other ryokans' hot-spring baths by paying a modest fee. Buffet-style meals are served in a communal dining room.

Komagatake 2-1, Tazawako-machi, Senboku-gun, Akita 014-1201. ☎ **0187/46-2244**. Fax 0187/46-2700. 38 units (all with toilet, 3 with bathrooms). ¥10,800 (\$90) single with toilet only, ¥11,300 (\$94) single with bathroom; ¥9,800 (\$82) per person double with toilet only, ¥10,300 (\$86) per person double with bathroom. Rates include 2 meals. MC, V. Bus: From Tazawako Station, 50 min. to Qkamura-mae stop. **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

(260) Tsuru-no-yu Onsen ★★ ★ *Finds* By far, this is the best place to stay in Nyuto Onsen, if not in all of Tohoku. Contrary to what you might think, however, it's not refined or elegant; it's not even expensive. Rather, nestled in a wooded valley more than 2.5km (1½ miles) off the already isolated main Nyuto Onsen road, this is about as remote as you can get in Japan. And with its thatched-roof row house of tiny tatami rooms lit by oil lamps, complemented by the sound of rushing water and steam rising from the outdoor baths, it seems positively ancient. I've never seen anything like it.

Tsuru-no-yu opened as an onsen 350 years ago; its oldest building—the row house of connected rooms—is 100 years old. (The biggest drawback to staying in one of these is that you have to walk outside to reach a bathroom, a definite inconvenience in winter.) Additions that ramble along the hillside were constructed over the years; the best room, on a corner beside the rushing stream, has its own toilet and open-hearth fireplace (*irori*) where you'll have dinner (breakfast is served in a dining hall). If you're on a budget, however, you can stay in the self-cooking wing, which offers simple tatami rooms and allows you to cook your own meals in a communal kitchen. Outdoor sulfurous baths are separated for men and women but are not especially private and, unfortunately, day-trippers spoil some of the fun of staying here. Evenings, however, are magical. Another plus: This is one of the few onsen open all year, with great cross-country skiing. **Caveat:** Avoid the modern annex Yama no Dado about 10 minutes down the road. Its indoor baths are unspectacular (and its outdoor bath is for both sexes); if you've come this far, stay in the real thing.

Kokuyurin 50, Tazawako-machi, Senboku-gun, Akita 014-1204. ☎ **0187/46-2139**. Fax 0187/46-2761. 35 units (9 with toilet, none with bathroom). ¥8,000 – ¥15,000 (\$67–\$125) per person including 2 meals. ¥2,500 (\$21) per person in the self-cooking wing with communal kitchen. MC, V. Pickup available from Kogen Onsen bus station. **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths. *In room:* Hot-water pot with tea, no phone in cheapest rooms.

LAKE TOWADA & OIRASE STREAM ★★

Located at the northern end of Towada-Hachimantai National Park on the border between Aomori and Akita prefectures, **Lake Towada** (Towadako in Japanese) is considered one of the park's top scenic gems. It's certainly one of Japan's least spoiled lakes, with only two small villages on its perimeter and encircled by wooded cliffs and mountains. Best, however, is **Oirase Stream**, the only river flowing out of Lake Towada. A shaded mountain stream that courses over boulders and

down waterfalls, it is flanked by a hiking trail offering one of the prettiest walks in Tohoku. In autumn, leaves of gold and red render the scenery truly spectacular.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Since Lake Towada does not lie close to a train station, your final journey to the lake must be by bus. First take a **train** to Hachinohe, Towada-Minami, or Aomori. Then continue onward by a **bus** to Yasumiya (also called Towadako-machi), a small village on Lake Towada with a tourist office and a few accommodations; the name of the bus stop in Yasumiya is Towadako.

To reach Hachinohe, take the 3-hour **Shinkansen train** ride from Tokyo; from Hachinohe, the bus trip to Yasumiya takes about 2¼ hours and costs ¥2,420 (\$20).

From Towada-Minami (which is not on the Shinkansen line; from Tokyo, take the Shinkansen 2 hours 20 minutes to Morioka Station and transfer there for the local JR Hanawa Line 2 hours 20 minutes to Towada-Minami Station), the closest train station to Lake Towada, there are four buses daily (taking about an hour) to Yasumiya costing ¥1,130 (\$9.40).

Aomori is more convenient if you're arriving from Hokkaido. Outside Aomori Station, to the left, you can board a JR bus bound for Lake Towada, with the last stop at Yasumiya. If you have a JR Rail Pass, you can ride for free. Otherwise, the 3-hour bus ride costs ¥3,000 (\$25). Note that this bus travels the same road as the hiking trail along Oirase Stream (see below) and makes several stops there, with about six runs daily. Note, too, that bus service to Lake Towada is available only from April to early November; for a JR bus, you can make reservations in advance at a major JR train station or travel agency. For more information, contact the **JR Bus** company in Aomori at ☎ 017/773-5722.

CAR RENTALS **JR Eki Rent-A-Car** has offices at Aomori Station (☎ 017/722-3930) and Morioka Station (☎ 019/624-5212). **Toyota Rent-A-Car** also has offices near Aomori Station (☎ 017/734-0100) and Morioka Station (☎ 019/622-0100).

VISITOR INFORMATION At the Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai Airport Tourist Information Centers, be sure to pick up the "Towada-Hachimantai National Park" leaflet.

In Yasumiya, the **Lake Towada Information Center** (☎ 0176/75-2425; open daily 8am–5pm) is located next to the JR Bus Center (to the right after you exit the bus terminal's main door). Be sure to ask for your Aomori Welcome Card, free for visiting foreigners and providing discounts to several area accommodations and the sightseeing boat on Lake Towada.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND Yasumiya, a village on the southwestern shore of Lake Towada, has a bus terminal, a tourist office, and a handful of accommodations and restaurants. On the eastern side of the lake is Nenokuchi, trail head for hikes along Oirase Stream. You can reach Yasumiya, Nenokuchi, and several stops along the hiking trail via the same **JR bus** that connects Lake Towada with Aomori Station, with approximately six runs a day from April to early November. Otherwise, your best bet for travel between Yasumiya and Nenokuchi is via **sightseeing boat** (see below).

SEEING THE SIGHTS

In Yasumiya, the major point of interest is **Towada Jinja Shrine**, which boasts marvelous wood carvings of animals. Nearby, on the shore of Towadako, is a sculpture of two middle-aged women, whose generous proportions are a welcome sight after the golden nymph at Lake Tazawa.

SIGHTSEEING BOATS ON LAKE TOWADA The best way to enjoy the pristine beauty of crystal-clear **Lake Towada (Towadako)**, a double caldera formed some 20,000 years ago by a volcanic eruption, is aboard excursion boats that cruise the waters April to mid-November. About 44km (27 miles) of undulating coastline marked by capes, inlets, cliffs, and trees that put on a spectacular autumn show make this one of Towada-Hachimantai National Park's major draws. Two cruises are available: a 1-hour cruise that begins and ends at Yasumiya, and a 50-minute cruise that travels between Yasumiya and Nenokuchi. (There are only a few souvenir shops here but the trail head for Oirase Stream starts here, so visitors can first take the boat ride and then begin hiking.) The cost of either is ¥1,320 (\$11) for adults and ¥660 (\$5.50) for children (the Aomori Welcome Card provides a 10% discount). A surcharge of ¥500 (\$4.15) for adults and ¥250 (\$2.10) for children is levied if you wish to sit in the top lounge.

HIKING OIRASE STREAM ★★ To my mind, hiking along the Oirase Stream is the major draw for a trip to Lake Towada. A clear-running, gurgling stream that runs 67km (42 miles) on its way from the lake to the Pacific Ocean, it's at its picture-perfect best in **Oirase Gorge**, where hikers are treated to a myriad of waterfalls, rapids coursing over moss-covered boulders, and a dense wood of Japanese beech, oaks, and other broad-leaved trees. A trail runs beside the stream from Nenokuchi on the lakeshore 14km (8.8 miles) to Yakeyama. Most hikers, however, go only as far as Ishigedo, hiking the 9km (5.5 miles) in about 2 hours. Disappointingly, a road runs through the gorge beside the stream, but the pathway often diverges from the road, and the roar of the swift-running river and the 13 waterfalls masks the sound of vehicles.

There are nine bus stops on the road beside Oirase Stream, including Nenokuchi, Ishigedo, and Yakeyama. Since buses run only once an hour or so, you might consider taking a bus first and then hiking back. Alternatively, if you're coming from or going to Aomori with luggage, you can take advantage of a baggage transfer service for hikers operating between Yakeyama and Nenokuchi (buses will wait for you at Yakeyama if you want to send your luggage onward but wish to begin hiking at Ishigedo). There are **luggage transfers** in both directions four times a day from Golden Week (end of Apr) to early November; the cost is ¥400 (\$3.35) per bag (call ☎ **0176/76-1121** or 0176/74-1111 for schedule information). In any case, the hike upstream (toward Nenokuchi) is considered the most picturesque, since it affords a full view of the cascading rapids.

WHERE TO STAY

Minshuku Himemasu Sanso and Oirase Keiryu Grand Hotel offer a 10% discount on room charges for holders of the Aomori Welcome Card. Be sure to mention the card when making reservations, and show it when you check in. Peak season is August and October; book far in advance for these months.

②61 **Himemasu Sanso** *Value* This modest but pleasant *minshuku* has a convenient location near the JR bus terminal in Yasumiya and offers simple tatami rooms, some of which have good views of the surrounding wooded hills. Meals are served communally and usually feature trout from Lake Towada and local wild mountain vegetables; Western-style breakfasts are available on request.

16 Aza Towada, Oaza Okuse, Towadako-machi, Kamikita-gun, Aomori 018-5501. ☎ **0176/75-2717**. Fax 0176/75-2717. 16 units (none with bathroom). ¥6,300 (\$53) per person. Rates include 2 meals, tax, and service charge. No credit cards. A 5-min. walk inland from the JR bus station. **Amenities:** Coffee shop. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

Oirase Keiryu Grand Hotel The main reason for staying in this large, rather ordinary hotel is its location on Oirase Stream, making it an easy base for hiking the Oirase Gorge trail. It also offers a free bus shuttle from Aomori Station (inquire about departure times when making reservations). The hotel is divided into two sections: the older Daiichi (1st) Wing with 105 rooms, and the newer Daini (2nd) Wing with 85 rooms. I prefer the Daini with its lobby overlooking the stream and maple trees and its hard-to-overlook giant fireplace sculpture by eccentric Okamoto Taro. It offers both Japanese tatami and twin rooms, about half with views of Oirase Stream (which cost an extra ¥2,000/\$17). Public hot-spring baths also take advantage of river views.

Oirase Keiryu Onsen, Towadako-machi, Aomori 034-0300. ☎ 0176/74-1111. Fax 0176/74-1118. 190 units. ¥13,000 – ¥17,000 (\$108–\$142) per person. Rates include 2 meals. Off-season discounts available. MC, V. Bus: Yakeyama (1 min.). **Amenities:** 7 restaurants; 5 bars and lounges; indoor hot-spring baths; game room; souvenir shops; in-room massage; laundry room (free of charge). *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

Towada Hotel ★★☆☆ This imposing, elegant hotel is my top choice for a splurge on Lake Towada. Secluded on a wooded hill overlooking the lake (and practical only if you have your own car), it was built in 1938 using huge cedar logs in a mix of Western-lodge-meets-Japanese-temple style, with a modern addition built years later. Former U.S. ambassador Edwin Reischauer and Emperor Showa have stayed here; nowadays most American guests are high-ranking officers from a nearby U.S. military base. Although all rooms face the lake, best are the Japanese rooms, all in the older part of the hotel and elegant with great views. Western-style rooms, though spacious and beautifully designed, do not have as good a view; be sure to ask for a room on the top floor and be sure, too, to wander over to the older wing for a look at its beautiful wood details in the old lobby (crafted by temple carpenters). Unfortunately, the public baths do not have hot-spring waters, but they do have lakeside views and outdoor tubs. Meals, served in a communal dining room with a mix of Japanese and Western dishes, are substantial. Western-style breakfasts are available.

Gosaka-machi, Towadako Nishi-goham, Akita 018-55111. ☎ 0176/75-1122. Fax 0176/75-1313. 50 units (46 with bathroom). Peak season ¥18,000 (\$150) per person; regular season ¥15,000 (\$125) weekends and ¥12,000 (\$100) weekdays. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. Pickup service available from JR bus terminal in Yasumiya. **Amenities:** Restaurant and lounge; indoor/outdoor public baths; Jacuzzi; sauna; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Tsuta Onsen ★ This classic, north-country inn dates to 1918 and is one of Tohoku's most famous traditional ryokan. *Tsuta* means ivy in Japanese, a theme carried out not only in pillars, transoms, and other architectural details but also in the dense, surrounding beech forest. Rooms in the original wooden structure, up a long flight of stairs, have beautiful wood-carved details and good views but are without bathrooms (they're also cheaper). The rooms in the addition, constructed in 1989 and served by elevator, lack the character of the older rooms but are nice enough and have the convenience of bathrooms. For the best views, be sure to request a room facing away from the street. For those who don't like sleeping on futons, three combination units offer both tatami rooms and beds. The hot-spring baths are new but preserve traditional bathhouse architecture, with high ceilings and cypress walls. Breakfast is served in a communal dining room, but for dinner you have a choice of dining communally or in your room. Although not as conveniently located as, say, the Oirase Keiryu Grand Hotel (see above), the Tsuta is served by the same JR bus that travels between Aomori

and Lake Towada (it's about a 15-min. bus ride to Yakeyama). It also has its own 1-hour hiking trail to a nearby lake.

Okuse, Aza Tsutanoyu, Towadako-machi, Kamikita-gun, Aomori 034-0301. ☎ **0176/74-2311**. Fax 0176/74-2244. 50 units (30 with bathroom). ¥10,000 – ¥32,000 (\$83–\$267) per person. Rates include 2 meals. DC. Bus: From Aomori Station, a 2-hour JR bus ride to Tsuta Onsen stop (1 min.). **Amenities:** Hot-spring indoor bath; in-room massage. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

Most accommodations serve breakfast and dinner. For an inexpensive meal on the Oirase Gorge trail, a small snack bar at Ishigedo sells ramen noodles, tempura soba, ice cream, and drinks.

Komorebi WESTERN A convenient place for lunch in Yakeyama if you're hiking the Oirase Gorge trail, this simple hotel restaurant offers set lunches that include beef or fish as their main dishes, as well as simpler choices like curry rice from a Japanese menu. There are several other restaurants in the hotel, including those serving Japanese and Chinese food.

Oirase Keiryu Grand Hotel (Daini Wing), Oirase Keiryu Onsen. ☎ **0176/74-1111**. Set lunch ¥1,000 – ¥3,000 (\$8.35–\$25). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm (last order). Bus: Yakeyama (1 min.).

Northern Japan—Hokkaido

Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four main islands, has a landscape strikingly different from that of any other place in Japan. With more than 77,700 sq. km (30,000 sq. miles) and accounting for 22% of Japan's total landmass, it has only 5% of its population. In other words, Hokkaido has what the rest of Japan doesn't—space. The least developed of Japan's four islands, it's your best bet for avoiding the crowds that plague Japan's more well-known playgrounds during peak travel season.

Considered the country's last frontier, Hokkaido didn't begin opening up to development until after the Meiji Restoration in 1868, when the government began encouraging Japanese to migrate to the island. Even today, Hokkaido has a frontier feel to it, and many young Japanese come here to backpack, ski, camp, and tour the countryside on motorcycles or bicycles. There are dairy farms, silos, and broad, flat fields of wheat, corn, and potatoes. Where the fields end the land puckers up, becoming craggy with bare volcanoes, deep gorges, and hills densely covered with virgin forests and dotted with clear spring lakes, mountain ranges, rugged wilderness, wild animals, bubbling hot springs, and rare

plants. And the people of Hokkaido are as open and hearty as the wide expanses of land around them.

Much of Hokkaido's wilderness has been set aside as national and prefectural parkland. Of these areas, Shikotsu-Toya, Daisetsuzan, and Akan national parks are the best known, offering a wide range of activities from hiking and skiing to bathing at *onsen*, or hot-spring spas.

Hokkaido's main tourist season is in August, when days are cool and pleasant with an average temperature of 70°F (21°C). While the rest of the nation is afflicted by the rainy season, Hokkaido's summers are usually bright and clear. Winters are long and severe; still, ski enthusiasts flock to slopes near Sapporo and to resorts such as Daisetsuzan National Park. February marks the annual Sapporo Snow Festival, featuring huge ice and snow sculptures.

With its Chitose Airport, the city of Sapporo—Japan's largest city north of Tokyo—serves as a springboard to Hokkaido's national parks and lakes. Yet despite all that the area has to offer, and despite its size and importance, I've seen few foreigners in Sapporo, even in August. To most visitors to Japan, Hokkaido remains virtually undiscovered.

1 Hokkaido Essentials

INFORMATION Information on Hokkaido is available online at www.all-hokkaido.net/marugoto.

GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND The fastest way to reach Hokkaido is to **fly**. Flights from Tokyo's Haneda Airport to Sapporo's **Chitose Airport** take about 1½ hours. Although flights have traditionally cost upwards of ¥25,200 (\$210) one-way (¥28,000/\$233 in peak season), renegade airline **Air**

Do (☎ 03/3490-1122 in Tokyo, ☎ 011/707-1122 in Sapporo) offers one-way tickets to Tokyo for ¥21,000 (\$175) or less. **ANA** also has two flights a day to **Kushiro Airport** on the eastern side of the island; the one-way fare from Tokyo costs ¥35,000 (\$292) in summer. There are discounts for advance purchase and other times of the year. From North America, for example, you might fly ANA to Sapporo with a stopover in Tokyo.

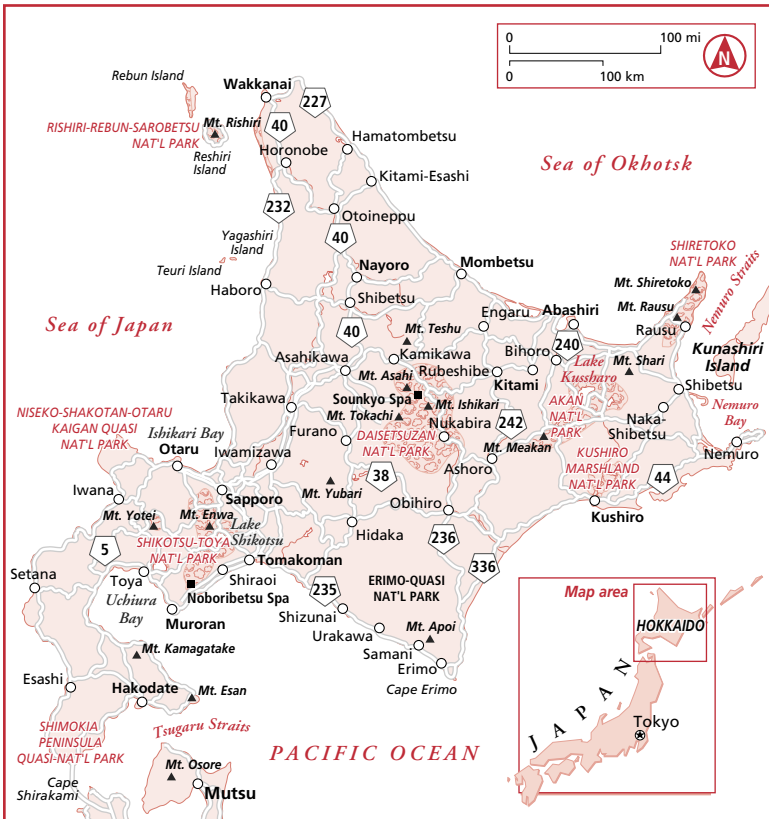
Travel to Hokkaido by land is generally via the **Tohoku Shinkansen** bullet train (called the Hayate) from Ueno or Tokyo Station in Tokyo to Hachinohe in Tohoku, followed by the **limited express Hakucho train** from Hachinohe all the way to Hakodate on Hokkaido. For centuries, the only way to travel between Honshu and Hokkaido was via a 4-hour ferry ride, but the opening of the Seikan Tunnel in 1988 allowed the entire trip between the islands to be made by train in little more than 2 hours—more than a fourth of which is in the 55km (34-mile) tunnel. The entire trip from Tokyo to Hakodate (on Hokkaido) via train should take about 6 hours and costs ¥18,930 (\$158) for a reserved seat one-way. The trip from Tokyo to Sapporo takes about 9 hours (not including transfers) and costs ¥23,610 (\$197) for reserved seating. Your **JR Rail Pass** is good for all trains.

Public transportation around Hokkaido is by train and bus. In addition to regular bus lines, sightseeing buses link the national parks and major attractions. Although they're more expensive than trains and regular buses, and although commentaries are only in Japanese, they offer unparalleled views of the countryside and usually stop at scenic wonders. Keep in mind that bus schedules fluctuate with the seasons, and that some lines don't run during the snowy winter months.

JR Hokkaido Passes If you plan to do a lot of traveling in Hokkaido and you're not traveling with a Japan Rail Pass, you should consider purchasing one of several special passes issued by Japan Railways that allows unlimited travel on JR trains and buses in Hokkaido. The **Hokkaido Rail Pass**, for example, works just like the Japan Rail Pass (you must be a foreign tourist visiting Japan) and is valid for 3 days of travel throughout Hokkaido. The ordinary pass, which can be purchased abroad (at JTB and other authorized travel agencies) or at train stations in Hakodate, Sapporo, and a few other cities in Hokkaido, costs ¥14,000 (\$117); first class costs ¥20,000 (\$167). Alternatively, the **Hokkaido Free Kippu** can be used by anyone (including Japanese and foreigners living in Japan) and can be purchased anywhere in Japan *except* Hokkaido. Allowing unlimited travel in Hokkaido, the 7-day pass costs ¥23,750 (\$198) for one person or ¥43,220 (\$360) for a couple traveling together, but it is not valid May 3 to May 5, August 13 to August 16, or December 29 to January 4. You can also purchase a Free Kippu in conjunction with your train fare from the city where your trip starts to Hokkaido; a Free Kippu that includes transportation from and to Tokyo, for example, costs ¥43,700 (\$364).

Renting a Car Because distances are long and traffic is rather light, Hokkaido is one of the few places in Japan where driving your own car is actually recommended. Because it's expensive, however, it's economical only if there are several of you. Rates for a 1-day rental of a compact car begin at ¥6,000 (\$50) per day with unlimited mileage, and each additional day costs ¥5,000 (\$42). Insurance will run another ¥1,000 (\$8.35) per day. Car-rental agencies are found throughout Hokkaido, often near train stations as well as at Chitose Airport outside Sapporo and at Kushiro Airport in Kushiro. In Sapporo, **Toyota Rent-A-Car** (☎ 011/281-0100) is located east of Sapporo Station. **JR Eki Rent-A-Car Hokkaido** (☎ 011/241-0931), near the south exit of Sapporo Station, offers

Hokkaido



20% discounts for train fares booked in conjunction with car rentals. Their offices are always located near a JR Station.

A GOOD STRATEGY FOR SEEING HOKKAIDO If you're traveling from Tokyo, your first destination in Hokkaido should be **Hakodate**, a convenient one-night stopover. From there you can board a local train bound for **Sapporo**, stopping off at **Shikotsu-Toya National Park** along the way. After spending a few days in Sapporo, take the train to Kamikawa and transfer there for a direct bus to **Sounkyo Onsen** in **Daisetsuzan National Park**. From Sounkyo Onsen, you can then continue your trip by taking a bus back to Kamikawa and transferring there to a train to Bihoro, where you can pick up a sightseeing bus departing for **Akan National Park** and stopping at **Lake Akan**. From Akan, you may wish to return to Tokyo by plane from Kushiro Airport. To follow this plan, you'll need at least a week.

2 Hakodate, Southern Gateway to Hokkaido ★

888km (549 miles) NE of Tokyo; 283km (177 miles) SW of Sapporo

Hakodate, the southern gateway to Hokkaido, is about as far as you may care to get in a day if you arrive in Hokkaido from Tokyo by train. Hakodate makes a good 1-night stopover because it has one nighttime attraction and one early

morning attraction, which means you can easily see a little of the city before you set out for your next destination.

Founded during the Feudal Era, Hakodate was one of Japan's first ports opened to international trade following the Meiji Restoration. Today it has a population of about 290,000, making it Hokkaido's third-largest city. Yet it feels provincial in atmosphere—it's still an outpost despite the recent renovation of its former warehouse district into shops and restaurants, and its wealth of century-old Western-style buildings. That's part of its charm.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE From Tokyo, take the **Shinkansen** bullet train “Hayate” to Hachinohe (3 hr.), then transfer to a direct train for Hakodate (about 3 hr.). The total fare for a reserved seat is ¥18,930 (\$158). There's also a night train that departs Ueno Station in Tokyo around 7pm, arriving in Hakodate the next morning at 6:30am and costing ¥21,000 (\$175); if you have a JR Rail Pass, you'll pay only a ¥9,450 (\$79) sleeping-car surcharge. Hakodate is about 3½ hours from Sapporo, Hokkaido's largest city. See “Hokkaido Essentials,” above for further details. **ANA** and **JAL** fly from Tokyo's Haneda Airport to Hakodate; one-way fare for the 1¼-hour trip is ¥23,900 to ¥28,500 (\$199–\$238), depending on the season.

GETTING AROUND With the exception of Mount Hakodate, the most pleasant way to see Hakodate is on foot. The city is easy to navigate, and there are many signs in English. Otherwise, streetcars are the major form of transportation, with fares starting at ¥200 (\$1.67); take a ticket upon entering the back door.

VISITOR INFORMATION The **Tourist Information Centers** located in Tokyo, Kyoto, and international airports in Tokyo and Osaka have a pamphlet called “Hakodate and Vicinity.” Otherwise, the **Hakodate Tourist Office** (☎ 0138/23-5440; open daily 9am–7pm, to 5pm Nov–Mar) is just to the right after you exit Hakodate Station. The office provides an excellent English map of Hakodate as well as a transportation map and other information. Check www.hakodate.or.jp for more information.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

In addition to the sights here, you might also want to explore the renovated **warehouse district** with its shops and restaurants as well as historic **Motomachi**, a picturesque neighborhood of steep slopes and turn-of-the-20th-century Western-style clapboard homes and buildings. The Hokkaido Prefectural Government's old branch office in Motomachi Park contains a small **tourist office** (☎ 0138/27-3333) open daily 9am to 7pm (to 5pm in winter).

MOUNT HAKODATE AFTER DARK Hakodate is probably most famous for its night view from atop Mount Hakodate, which rises 330m (1,100 ft.) just 2.8km (1¾ miles) southwest of Hakodate Station, so you should time your visit just at sunset (though note that it can be chilly up here, even in Aug). Few vacationing Japanese spend the night in Hakodate without taking the cable car to the top of this lava cone, which was formed by the eruption of an undersea volcano. From the peak, the lights of Hakodate shimmer and glitter like jewels on black velvet. I wouldn't miss it, not only for the view but for the camaraderie shared by everyone making the pilgrimage. There's an informal restaurant here (where you can indulge in a drink or a snack while admiring the spectacular view) as well as the usual souvenir shops.

You can reach the foot of Mount Hakodate via a 5-minute streetcar ride from Hakodate Station to the Jujigai stop. From there, walk about 6 minutes to the cable car that will take you to the top. The round-trip costs ¥1,160 (\$10) for adults and ¥590 (\$5) for children. Cable-car hours are daily 10am to 10pm April 26 through October (from 9am during Golden Week and in Aug), and 10am to 9pm November through April 25. From April 25 to November (daily during peak season but otherwise only on weekends), you can also reach the top of Mount Hakodate directly by bus from Hakodate Station; the 30-minute trip costs ¥360 (\$3) for adults and half price for children.

THE MORNING MARKET The other popular thing to do is visit Hakodate's morning market, which is spread out just south of the train station daily from about 5am to noon (closed Sun, Oct–Apr). Walk around and look at the variety of foods for sale, especially the hairy crabs for which Hokkaido is famous. You can make an unusual breakfast of fruit, raw sea urchin, or grilled crab from the stalls here.

WHERE TO STAY

Hakodate's peak tourist season is in July and August. Accordingly, some hotels raise their rates during this time.

EXPENSIVE

Hotel Sea Borne ★★ If you're searching for a small boutique hotel with class, this is a top pick. Its elegant lobby, with reproduction antique furniture, imparts a cozy European atmosphere, while each of its rooms is decorated in a different theme, from modern to frilly European to rustic American. (Apparently, some Japanese guests are so enamored of the different styles that they request a change of rooms the 2nd night, just for the experience.) Granted, jaded travelers might find it all a bit over the top, but excellent service from a friendly staff, welcome drinks (tea, coffee, or soft drink the 1st night; a cocktail the 2nd night), good in-room amenities (including four different kinds of shampoo), and a great location near the warehouse district make this place infinitely better than your standard hotel.

14–28 Suehiro-cho, Hakodate 040-0053. ☎ 0138/27-4411. Fax 0138/27-0028. www.dish.ne.jp/seaborne. 20 units. ¥13,500 – ¥15,000 (\$113–\$125) single; ¥20,000 – ¥25,000 (\$167–\$208) double; ¥23,000 – ¥35,000 (\$192–\$292) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 5 min. Streetcar: Jujigai (2 min.). Turn right and walk 2 blocks toward the bay; it will be across the street, on your left. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); tearoom; room service (5–9:30pm); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

②62 **Wakamatsu Ryokan** ★★ Here's a seaside inn worthy of a splurge. Almost a century old (grainy black-and-white photographs in the lobby memorialize Emperor Showa's 1954 visit) but renovated and with a seven-story wing added in 1994, it's the epitome of an updated but elegant ryokan. Pampering begins as soon as you enter the grand, teahouse-style entrance, where a kimono-clad hostess ushers you to your room and brings a welcome tea. After soaking in the public hot-spring baths overlooking the sea, you'll be treated to a kaiseki feast in your room (again with views of the sea). The sea is so close you'll fall asleep listening to the gentle sound of waves. Bonuses are the nearby Yunokawa public swimming beach and the night illumination of fishing boats searching for squid. The main disadvantage to staying here is location—near the airport (thank goodness planes don't fly at night) and a long, 30-minute streetcar ride from Hakodate Station (a taxi will set you back about ¥1,700/\$14).

1–2–27 Yunokawa-cho, Hakodate 042-0932. ☎ 0138/59-2171. Fax 0138/59-3316. wakamatsu@hakodate.ne.jp. 29 units (26 with bathroom). ¥27,000–¥74,000 (\$225–\$617) per person. Rates include breakfast, dinner, and service charge. AE, DC, MC, V. Taxi: 15 min. from Hakodate Station, 7 min. from Hakodate Airport. Streetcar: 2 or 5 to Yunokawa Onsen (6 min.). Turn right and walk along a canal until it ends; the inn is across the street, to the right. **Amenities:** Hot-spring indoor/outdoor baths; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe.

MODERATE

B&B Hakodatemura This immaculate, mostly Western-style Japanese Inn Group member, decorated with whitewashed walls, wood furniture, and fresh and dried flowers, is built around a courtyard where you can choose to eat breakfast. In addition to the Western-style rooms, there are two tatami rooms and one triple with a loft bed; only one double has a bathroom. Rules are similar to a youth hostel's (check in at 3pm, check out at 10am, and the door locks at 11pm), but what I like most about this place is its location near the warehouse district and Motomachi, and only a 15-minute walk from Hakodate Station.

16–12 Suehiro-cho, Hakodate 040-0053. ☎ 0138/22-8105. Fax 0138/22-8925. www.hotweb.or.jp/p.h.mura. 18 units (1 with bathroom). ¥5,300 (\$44) single; ¥9,600 (\$80) twin; ¥11,600 (\$97) double with bathroom; ¥14,400 (\$120) triple. Western breakfast ¥700 (\$5.85) extra. ¥500 (\$4.15) extra mid-July to Aug. Winter discounts available. AE, MC, V. Streetcar: Jujigai (2 min.); follow the streetcar tracks for 1 block, turn right, and then turn left. Closed Dec 1–Jan 15. **Amenities:** Coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* A/C (some with fan only), TV, hot-water pot with tea.

Harborview Hotel Location, location, location: This hotel's main selling point is its convenience to Hakodate Station. Despite its name, none of the rooms face the harbor, though those closest to the waterfront from the seventh floor up do have water views to the side if you stand at the window. Standard rooms are small but pleasant.

14–10 Wakamatsu-cho, Hakodate 040-0063. ☎ 0138/22-0111. Fax 0138/23-0154. 200 units. ¥11,000 (\$92) single; ¥18,000 (\$150) double; ¥22,000–¥27,000 (\$183–\$225) twin. Weekends and holiday evenings May–Oct, ¥500 (\$4.15) extra per person. Off-season discounts available. AE, DC, MC, V. Just to the right as you exit Hakodate Station (less than 1 min.). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese and Western); 2 bars; lounge; shopping arcade; in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Hotel Chocolat Hakodate I'm not sure how this hotel, opened in 1991, got its name (sometimes these things remain mysteries), but it appeals to a mostly young female clientele with its lobby mural of frolicking cute dogs, flower arrangements, reasonable rates, and handy location halfway between Hakodate Station (a 20-min. walk away) and the Motomachi historic district. Rooms (mostly twins) are rather ordinary, with windows that open; best are the roomy deluxe corner twins on the sixth floor.

1–1 Otemachi, Hakodate 040-0064. ☎ 0138/26-1330. Fax 0138/26-0393. choco330@oregano.ocn.ne.jp. 39 units. ¥8,000 (\$67) single; ¥10,000–¥20,000 (\$83–\$167) twin. Off-season discounts available. AE, DC, MC, V. Streetcar: Uoichiba-dori (1 min.). Turn left; the hotel will be on the next block, on the left, on a corner. **Amenities:** Restaurant (open only for breakfast); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

Niceday Inn *Value* The Saitos, the kind and generous couple who run this inn, give a warm welcome and make you feel right at home. Mr. Saito, who speaks English, offers lots of tourist information and a map. Staying here is like living with a Japanese family. The inn is very simple but offers clean Japanese- and Western-style rooms. No meals are served, but free instant coffee, a refrigerator, a TV, and a public phone are available in the small communal entry room.

9–11 Otemachi, Hakodate 040-0064. ☎ 0138/22-5919. 6 units (none with bathroom). ¥3,000 (\$25) per person for foreigners. No credit cards. Station: Hakodate (8 min.). Take the street that runs on the west (bay) side of the Harborview Hotel right across from the station; after crossing the wide, tree-lined avenue, take the 4th left (across from the Kokusai Hotel entrance). The inn is a white, 2-story building on your right. *In room:* A/C or fan, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Several of Hakodate's harborfront warehouses have been renovated into smart-looking shopping and dining complexes. They're about a 10-minute walk from Hakodate Station; you can reach the complexes by walking past the right (bay) side of Harborview Hotel and continuing along the seaside promenade.

Hakodate Beer BAR FOOD Near the warehouse district, this attractive brick building with outdoor seating and an English-language menu offers three kinds of beer brewed in the large copper vats you can see as you dine on such fare as fish and chips, the day's pasta, Japanese-style fried chicken, or a "steamboat"—seafood, sliced meat, vegetables, and dumplings cooked in boiling broth at your table and dipped in chile sauce. Set lunches are a steal.

5–22 Ohtemachi. ☎ 0138/23-8000. Main dishes ¥680–¥2,500 (\$5.65–\$21); set lunch ¥600 (\$5). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Streetcar: Uoichiba-dori, then walk 3 blocks toward the bay; it's on the corner. Station: Hakodate (9 min.).

②63 **Ika Matsuri SUSHI** A long conveyor belt, with stools on one side and family-size booths on the other, is loaded with different-colored saucers of sushi, each representing a different price. Just take what you want; when you're done, your plates will be tallied to figure the bill. Add ¥120 (\$1) for all-you-can-drink soft drinks; it's self-serve for ginger, soy sauce, and tea. You'll recognize this clean and cheerful place by the blue marlin above the name and King Kong climbing a pole to reach—what else?—a plate of sushi. Takeout sushi is also available.

24–10 Toyokawa-cho. ☎ 0138/27-5588. 2 pieces of sushi ¥120–¥580 (\$1–\$4.85). No credit cards. Daily 11am–10pm. Streetcar: Uoichiba-dori, then walk 3 blocks toward the bay; it's catty-corner from Hakodate Beer (see above), next to 7-Eleven. Station: Hakodate (9 min.).

Tao Tao ASIAN CROSSOVER This eclectic restaurant in a bright yellow building in the Motomachi District offers interesting Asian food, an amusing decor, and music videos. You might try Thai curry, a *naan* (Indian bread) sandwich, tacos with rice, or *adobocha han* (Manila-style) pork fried rice. Salads range from tofu (very good with lots of greens and a spicy dressing) to Harbin potato salad to *Shan Shan* ("smells good") salad of hot-bacon and lettuce. There's an outdoor patio for nice weather.

15–19 Motomachi. ☎ 0138/22-0002. Main dishes ¥750–¥1,000 (\$6.25–\$8.35). No credit cards. Tues–Fri 5–11pm; Sat–Sun noon–11pm. Streetcar: Suehiro-cho (3 min); walk 2 blocks up Hachiman-zaka and turn left.

3 Sapporo

1,200km (746 miles) NE of Tokyo; 283km (177 miles) NE of Hakodate

Sapporo is one of Japan's newest cities. A little more than a century ago, it was nothing more than a scattering of huts belonging to Ainu and Japanese families. With the dawning of the Meiji Period, however, the government decided to colonize the island, and in 1869 it established the Colonization Commission. The area of Sapporo (the name comes from the Ainu word meaning "big, dry river") was chosen as the site for the new capital, and in 1871, construction of the city began.

During the Meiji Period, Japan looked eagerly toward the West for technology, ideas, and education, and Hokkaido was no exception. Between 1871 and

1884, 76 foreign technicians and experts (including 46 Americans) who had experience in colonization were brought to this Japanese wilderness to aid in the island's development.

Sapporo was laid out in a grid pattern of uniform blocks similar to that of an American city. In 1875, the Sapporo Agricultural College was founded to train youth in skills useful to Hokkaido's colonization and development.

The Sapporo of today, capital of Hokkaido Prefecture, has grown to 1.8 million residents, making it the largest city north of Tokyo (and the 5th largest in Japan). In 1972, it was introduced to the world when the Winter Olympics were held here, and its many fine ski slopes continue to attract winter vacationers, as does the Sapporo Snow Festival held every February (see the "Calendar of Events," in chapter 2). In August, when the rest of Japan is sweltering under uncomfortably high temperatures and humidity, Sapporo stays pleasantly cool.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By Plane Flights take 1½ hours from Tokyo's Haneda Airport, 2 hours from Hiroshima, and 2¼ hours from Fukuoka. Air Do, which flies only between Tokyo and Sapporo, charges ¥21,000 (\$175) one-way. Both JAL and ANA charge as much as ¥28,000 (\$233) in peak season. (See "Getting There & Getting Around," under "Hokkaido Essentials," earlier in this chapter, for details on international flights.)

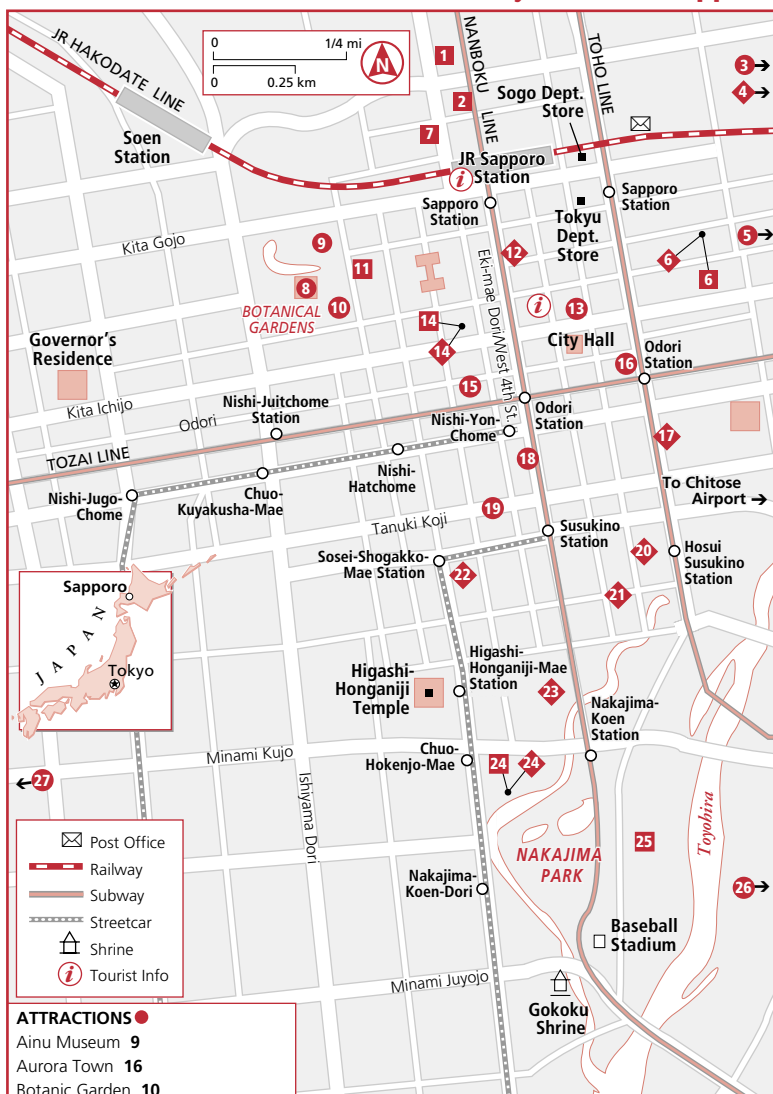
Sapporo's **Chitose Airport** (☎ 0123/23-0111), located about 43km (27 miles) southeast of the capital, is connected to downtown by either **Airport Limousine Bus**, which delivers passengers to a few major hotels in about 75 minutes for ¥820 (\$6.85) one-way; or by **JR trains** that operate between Chitose Airport Station and Sapporo Station, with the 36-minute trip costing ¥1,040 (\$8.65).

By JR Train Trains from Tohoku and other regions on Honshu arrive in Hakodate approximately every hour or 1½ hours; in Hakodate you'll transfer to trains departing every hour or so for Sapporo. The fare from Tokyo to Sapporo costs ¥23,610 (\$197), with trips averaging 12 hours including transfers. Three overnight trains also depart from Ueno Station in Tokyo and arrive in Sapporo the next morning, taking about 16 hours and costing ¥25,270 (\$211). In addition, an overnight train from Osaka departs at noon and arrives in Sapporo the next day at 9:07am, costing ¥25,620 (\$213). From Hakodate, trains to Sapporo take about 3½ hours and cost ¥8,590 (\$72).

VISITOR INFORMATION Be sure to pick up the useful leaflet "Sapporo and Shikotsu-Toya National Park" at a **Tourist Information Center** in Tokyo, Kyoto, or Tokyo or Osaka airports. In JR Sapporo Station, there's an **International Information Corner** (☎ 011/209-5030; open daily 9am–5:30pm) in the newly developed JR Tower Center (turn left out of the west ticket wicket). Multilingual volunteers here provide general hotel, sightseeing, and transportation information; there's also an English-language reading corner. **Plaza i** is in the MN Building across from the Clock Tower (see "A Stroll Around Sapporo," below) at N1 W3, Chuo-ku (☎ 011/211-3678; open daily 9am–5:30pm); it provides information on tourist attractions, daily life, and transportation, and offers guidebooks and maps. English-speakers are always available. Online, you can check www.welcome.city.sapporo.jp and www.global.city.sapporo.jp.

INTERNET ACCESS You can get online at **Bon de Bon** (☎ 011/213-5726; daily 10am–8:30pm), a cafe in the basement of the Paseo Mall in Sapporo Station

Attractions & Where to Stay & Dine in Sapporo



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Aurora Town **16**
Botanic Garden **10**
Clock Tower (Tokeidai) **13**
Historical Village of Hokkaido **26**
Historical Museum of Hokkaido **26**
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(Odori Park) **15**
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Sapporo Beer Museum **3**
Sapporo Factory **5**
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ACCOMMODATIONS

- Hotel Arthur **24**
 Hotel Lifort **25**
 Hotel Monterey Edelfhof **6**
 Nakamura Ryokan **11**
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 Toyoko Inn Sapporo
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DINING ♦

- Grand Chef **14**
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Napoli no daidokoro **17**
Palace Torioshi **22**
Ramen Yokocho **21**
Sapporo Beer Garden **4**
Taj Mahal **12**
21 Club **24**
Zuientei **6**

(opposite the east ticket wicket). It charges ¥200 (\$1.65) for 30 minutes, and you're expected to order a drink.

POST OFFICE **Sapporo Central Post Office**, N6, E1 (☎ 011/748-2336), a couple blocks east of Sapporo Station, has an ATM for cash advances (weekdays 7am–11pm and weekends 9am–7pm) on international credit cards, as well as a 24-hour window for stamps and mail.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND After the jumble of most Japanese cities with their incomprehensible address systems, Sapporo will come as a welcome surprise. Its streets are laid out in a grid pattern, making the city easy to navigate. Addresses in Sapporo refer to blocks that follow one another in logical, numerical order.

Sapporo Station lies at the north end of the city, with downtown and many of its attractions, hotels, and restaurants spreading to the south. The center of Sapporo is **Odori (Main St.)**, a tree-lined avenue south of Sapporo Station that runs east and west and bisects the city into north and south sections. **North 1st Street**, therefore, refers to the street 1 block north of Odori. The other determinant landmark is the **Soseigawa River**, which marks addresses east and west. **West 1st Street** runs along the west bank of the Soseigawa River, while **East 1st Street** runs along the east bank.

Addresses in Sapporo are generally given by block. **N1 W4**, for example, the address for the Sapporo Grand Hotel, means it's located in the first block north of Odori and 4 blocks west of West 1st Street. If you want to be more technical about it, the entire, formal address of the hotel would read N1-jo W4-chome. "Jo" refers to blocks north and south of Odori, while "chome" refers to blocks east and west of the river. Better yet, street signs in Sapporo are in English.

Central Sapporo is easy to cover on foot. You can walk south from Sapporo Station to **Odori Park** in less than 10 minutes and on to **Susukino**, Sapporo's nightlife district, in another 7 or 8 minutes. For longer distances, transportation in Sapporo is via **bus**, three **subway** lines (which interchange at **Odori Station**), and one **streetcar** line. Fares begin at ¥200 (\$1.65) (¥170/\$1.40 for streetcars), but easier is the **With You Card**, available in denominations beginning at ¥500 (\$4.15) and valid for city buses, subways, and streetcars. (The With You Card does not offer a discount, but it saves you the hassle of buying individual tickets each time you want to ride.) **One-day Cards**, allowing unlimited rides in one day, are also available, costing ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for all modes of transport and ¥800 (\$6.65) for subways only. Children pay half fare. Cards can be purchased at subway stations and on buses and streetcars.

Finally, the **Sapporo Sansaku Bus** is a **tourist bus** that loops around the city and stops at such sights and attractions as Sapporo Beer Garden, Nakajima Park, Susukino, and Maruyama Park, but unfortunately, it doesn't go to Nopporo Forest Park. A 1-day pass (¥750/\$6.25 adults, ¥380/\$3.15 children) allows you to get on and off as many times as you want between 9am and 7pm, from the end of April to November. Buses depart from the bus terminal in front of Sapporo Station's south exit, and stops are clearly marked.

A STROLL AROUND SAPPORO

One of the first things you should do in Sapporo is walk around. Starting from **Sapporo Station** (which contains two shopping malls and a Daimaru department store), take the street leading directly south called **Eki-mae Dori** (which is also West 4th). This is one of Sapporo's main thoroughfares, and it takes you through the heart of the city.

YOUR FIRST STOP Four blocks south of the station, turn left on N1; after a block, you'll find Sapporo's most famous landmark, **Clock Tower (Tokeidai)**, N1 W2, Chuo-ku (☎ 011/231-0838). This Western-style wooden building was built in 1878 as a drill hall for the Sapporo Agricultural College (now Hokkaido University). The large clock at the top was made in Boston and was installed in 1881. In summer, it attracts tourists even at night; they hang around the outside gates just to listen to the clock strike the hour. Inside the tower is a local-history museum, but it's in Japanese and is not worth the price of admission. By the way, across the street is **Plaza i**, where you can obtain information on Sapporo.

ON TO ODORI PARK If you continue walking 1 block south of the Clock Tower, you'll reach **Odori Koen Promenade**, a 103m (344-ft.) wide boulevard stretching almost a mile from east to west. In the middle of the boulevard is a wide median strip that has been turned into a park with trees, flower beds, and fountains. This is where much of the **Sapporo Snow Festival** is held in early February, when ice and packed snow are carved to form statues, palaces, and fantasies. Begun in 1950 to add a bit of spice and life to the cold winter days, the Snow Festival now features about 220 snow statues and 120 ice sculptures and draws about 2.2 million visitors a year. One snow structure may require as much as 300 6-ton truckloads of snow, brought in from the surrounding mountains. The snow and ice carvings are done with so much attention to detail that it seems a crime they're doomed to melt (see "Calendar of Events," in chapter 2).

Odori Park is also the scene of the **Sapporo Summer Festival**, celebrated with beer gardens set up the length of the park from mid-July to mid-August and open every evening beginning at 5pm and Saturday and Sunday from early afternoon. Various Japanese beer companies set up their own booths and tables under the trees, while vendors put up stalls selling fried noodles, corn on the cob, and other goodies. Live bands serenade the beer drinkers under the stars. It all resembles the cheerful confusion of a German beer garden, which isn't surprising considering Munich is one of Sapporo's sister cities (Portland, Oregon, is another one). Other festivals held in Odori Park are the **Lilac Festival** in late May heralding the arrival of summer, and **Bon-Odori** in mid-August with traditional dances to appease the souls of the dead.

THE UNDERGROUND SHOPPING ARCADES From Odori Park, you can continue your walk either above or below ground. Appreciated especially during inclement weather and during Hokkaido's long, cold winters are two underground shopping arcades. Underneath Odori Park, from the Odori Station all the way to the TV tower in the east, is **Aurora Town**, with boutiques and restaurants. Even longer is **Pole Town**, with 390m (1,300 ft.) of shops, almost 100 in all. Pole Town extends from the Odori Station south all the way to **Susukino**, Sapporo's nightlife amusement center, where you'll find many restaurants and pubs (see "Where to Dine," later in this chapter). Before reaching Susukino, however, you may want to emerge at **Sancho** (you'll see escalators going up), where you'll find more shopping at the kilometer-long **Tanuki-koji** covered shopping arcade's 300 boutiques and stores.

THE BOTANIC GARDEN 🌸 Backtracking now toward the station, you should stop at the 13-hectare (32-acre) **Shokubutsu-en**; its entrance is at N3 W8 (☎ 011/221-0066). It contains some virgin forest and more than 4,000 varieties of plants gathered from all over Hokkaido and arranged in marshland, herb, alpine, and other gardens. Of greater interest, perhaps, is the section devoted to plants used by the Ainu, whose extensive knowledge of plants covered not only

edible ones but also those with medicinal use and other properties, including organic poison used for arrows to kill bears and other game. Unfortunately, there are no English-language explanations of plant usage. Still, with lots of trees and grassy lawns, it's a good place for a summer afternoon picnic, which you may have to defend from a tame fox roaming the grounds.

Worth visiting on garden grounds is Japan's oldest **natural science museum**, founded in 1882 to document the wildlife of Hokkaido and housed in a turn-of-the-20th-century, Western-style building. Be sure, too, to visit the small, one-room **Ainu Museum**, which displays some fine examples of Ainu artifacts, including traditional costumes, jewelry, farming tools, hunting traps, harpoons, a canoe, and bamboo mouth harps (played by women and children). In any case, you'll probably want to spend at least 1 hour on the garden's grounds and in its museums.

The Botanic Garden and its museums are open April 29 to September 30, Tuesday through Sunday 9am to 4pm (in Oct it's open every day 9am–3:30pm except Mon). Admission, which includes the museums, is ¥400 (\$3.35) for adults and ¥280 (\$2.35) for children. From November 4 to April 28, only the greenhouse is open; admission then is ¥110 (90¢) for both adults and children.

MORE TO SEE & DO

Sapporo Beer Museum ★★ Although it's not within easy walking distance of Sapporo Station, if you think of beer when you hear the word "Sapporo," then you should make this museum part of your sightseeing itinerary. Famous throughout the world, Sapporo beer was brewed in this handsome brick factory from 1876 to 2003; today, the Sapporo Beer Company is the third-largest beer producer in Japan. You can learn all about Sapporo beer by joining a 50-minute free guided tour, which explains the history of the company and the brewing process, shows off company memorabilia (my favorite is the exhibit of advertising posters), and ends in a large hall where you get to sample the product. Tours depart every 15 minutes or so; although you can just show up and hope there's room, it's best to make reservations in advance during peak season to avoid having to wait. Although tours are conducted in Japanese only, a few of the guides speak English; ask whether it's possible to have an English-language interpreter at the time you make your reservation.

You might want to cap your tour with a meal or a mug of beer in the adjoining Sapporo Beer Garden (see "Where to Dine," below). Also, about a 12-minute walk from the Beer Museum is **Sapporo Factory**, N2 E4, Chuo-ku (☎ 011/207-5000), a shopping complex housing a microbrewery, restaurants, 140 shops, and movie theaters.

N7 E9, Chuo-ku. ☎ 011/731-4368. www.sapporobeer.jp/english/guide/sapporo. Free 50-min. tours of the museum held May–Oct daily 9am–3:40pm, Nov–Apr Mon–Fri 9am–3:40pm (closed holidays). Reservations are suggested. Bus: Higashi 63 from the north side of Sapporo Station to Kita 8 Higashi 7 stop (3 min.); or city bus Kan 88 on the Factory Line from the bus terminal south of Sapporo Station to Sapporo Beer Garden stop. The Beer Garden is also on the Sansaku bus line.

NOPORO FOREST PARK (NOPORO SHINRIN KOEN)

If you have an extra half day or more, I recommend this park on the outskirts for its two very worthwhile attractions. To reach the park, take a **JR train** to Shinrin Koen Station (a 20-min. ride), then walk 15 minutes in the direction of the tower (built in commemoration of Hokkaido's centennial). Or take the **Tozai subway line** 20 minutes to Shin-Sapporo Station, where you can then board a **JR bus** for a 10-minute ride to the last stop (Kaitaku-no Mura) for the Historical Village of Hokkaido. If your first stop is the Historical Museum of

Hokkaido, get off at the next-to-the-last stop, Kinenkan Iriguchi. It's about a 15-minute walk between the two attractions; in summer on weekends and holidays, a free shuttle bus connects the two.

Historical Village of Hokkaido (Kaitaku-no Mura) ★★ Kids This open-air museum of more than 60 historical Japanese- and Western-style buildings, dating mostly from the Meiji and Taisho eras and brought here from around Hokkaido, includes homes, farmhouses, a shrine, a church, a newspaper office, a post office (from which you can mail a letter), a police box (manned by a sword-wielding police officer), and many small businesses, including a blacksmith, brewery, barbershop, grocery, inn, and sleigh factory—all how they would have looked in the past. In summer, staff dressed in Meiji Era clothing are on hand to answer questions. You can easily spend 2 hours here, wandering through buildings of the fishing village, farm village, mountain village, and town. Kids like being able to run and explore; there's even an old-fashioned playground with stilts, a seesaw, and other traditional play equipment.

Konopporo 50-1, Atsubetsu-cho. ☎ 011/898-2692. Admission Apr–Nov ¥610 (\$5.10) adults, ¥450 (\$3.75) university and high-school students; Dec–Mar ¥500 (\$4.15) adults, ¥400 (\$3.35) university and high-school students. Free for children and seniors. June–Sept Tues–Sun 9am–5pm; Oct–May Tues–Sun 9:30am–4:30pm. Bus: Kaitaku-no-Mura (2 min.)

Historical Museum of Hokkaido (Kaitaku Kinenkan) ★ This museum does a great job detailing Hokkaido's development from prehistoric to modern times, with lots of information in English. The section on the Ainu displays clothing, a house, and other artifacts, and describes their forced assimilation into Japanese culture. You'll also learn about Hokkaido's early contacts with Russia, the lives of 19th-century Japanese pioneers, the opening of Hakodate Port, the establishment of Sapporo Agricultural College, and more. The Living Experience Room provides hands-on experience with tools, including a hand loom, and interactive displays. If history's your thing, you can easily spend 2 hours here.

Konopporo, Atsubetsu-cho. ☎ 011/898-0456. Admission ¥300 (\$2.50) adults, ¥100 (85¢) university and high-school students, ¥50 (40¢) children, free for seniors. Tues–Sun 9:30am–4:30pm. Closed some national holidays.

HITTING THE SLOPES

Skiing is big in Sapporo, site of the 1972 Winter Olympics and easily accessible by plane from many cities in Japan—there are slopes within city limits and more than a dozen skiing areas less than 2 hours away, most open from early December to late April. On the west edge of town are Okurayama Jump Hill and Miyanomori Jump Hill, both sites of the 1972 Winter Olympics. Here, too, is the **Sapporo Vankei Ski Area**, just 20 minutes from downtown Sapporo and popular for after-work skiing. You can reach them by subway to Maruyama Koen Station and then by bus.

Farther afield, the **Teine Olympia Ski Ground** (☎ 011/681-3191) is about an hour's bus ride from Sapporo Station. This was the site of the alpine, bobsled, and toboggan events for the Olympics. A 1-day pass to the ski lifts goes for ¥3,500 (\$29); ski-rental equipment is available for about ¥4,200 (\$35), while snowboarding gear costs ¥3,500 (\$29) per day. However, keep in mind that gear sizes are generally smaller than in the West. For further information on skiing in the region, stop by the Sapporo tourist office.

WHERE TO STAY

Sapporo has a large selection of fine hotels in various price categories. The busiest tourist seasons are summer and early February during the annual Snow

Festival. If you plan to attend the Snow Festival, book your room at least 6 months in advance. At other times you should have no problem finding a room, but it's always wise to make a reservation in advance. In winter (excluding festival time), some upper- and medium-priced hotels lower their room rates, sometimes by as much as 40%—be sure to ask for a discount.

EXPENSIVE

Hotel Arthur ★★ This smart-looking hotel with a European atmosphere is located near Nakajima-koen Park in a quiet section of town, offering refuge from tour buses and crowds and the opportunity for early-morning jogs. The lobby looks out over a green lawn made festive with lights. Rooms facing east have views of the park, while those facing west have views of city lights with mountains in the background. Standard rooms are rather small but are well equipped; business travelers will appreciate special rooms that allow wireless Internet access—for free. The staff is courteous and the service excellent; ask for an address or a hard-to-find item, and they'll come up with it. But what truly sets this hotel apart are its top-notch restaurants (unusual for a hotel this size outside downtown), including a high-class kaiseki restaurant, a teppanyaki restaurant with great views, and the Manhattan Grill serving American cuisine in a hip setting.

S10 W6, Chuo-ku, Sapporo 064-8561. ☎ 011/561-1000. Fax 011/521-5522. www.hotel-arthur-sapporo.co.jp. 229 units. ¥12,500–¥14,000 (\$104–\$117) single; ¥23,000 (\$192) double; ¥23,000–¥35,000 (\$192–\$292) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Subway: Namboku Line to Nakajima-koen (5 min.). Take exit 1 and turn left at the top of the stairs into the park (well-lit even at night); walk past the children's swings and over a bridge and continue bearing right until you leave the park and see the hotel in front of you. **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (kaiseki, teppanyaki, American, Chinese); 3 bars; lounge; business center; salon; room service (7am–11pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer.

Hotel Monterey Edelhof ★★★ Although opened in 2000, this elegant hotel embraces the architectural exuberance of early 1900s Vienna, with lots of marble, stained-glass windows, Art Deco embellishments, and Otto Wagner–inspired designs. Even the elevators have old-fashioned floor dials, classical music plays in public spaces, and function rooms carry names like Schönbrunn. Forgive me a sudden craving for Sachertorte. Located in downtown Sapporo, on the upper floors of an office building, the hotel offers small but smartly decorated rooms with a slightly Art Deco motif. The hotel spa, which utilizes hot springs tapped deep below ground and has the good Austro-Hungarian Empire name Karlovy Vary, is a huge (though pricey) plus. If you still don't think you're in the empire, check out the Wagner House Restaurant.

N2 W1, Chuo-ku, Sapporo 060-0002. ☎ 011/242-7111. Fax 011/232-1212. 181 units. ¥15,000 (\$125) single; ¥28,000–¥38,000 (\$233–\$317) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Sapporo (8 min.). **Amenities:** 4 restaurants (2 Japanese, Chinese, Continental); 2 lounges; hot-spring spa with sauna and Jacuzzi (fee: ¥1,800/\$15); room service (9pm–11pm); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service, nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

Sapporo Grand Hotel ★ This dignified hotel, open since 1934 and one of Sapporo's old-timers, has a good downtown location near the Botanic Garden and Odori Park. This is usually where VIPs stay when they come to town. It occupies three buildings constructed at various times: Company executives generally stay in the main building, groups and families usually opt for less expensive rooms in the east building, and business travelers take advantage of the mostly singles in the annex. Most rooms are fairly large and nicely furnished but—a sign

of the hotel's age—have small windows and small bathrooms. Note, too, that some of the cheapest rooms face another building. Still, you can't go wrong staying here.

N1 W4, Chuo-ku, Sapporo 060-0001. ☎ 011/261-3311. Fax 011/231-0388. 565 units. ¥13,000–¥16,000 (\$108–\$133) single; ¥24,000 (\$200) double; ¥23,500–¥38,000 (\$196–\$317) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Sapporo (8 min.). **Amenities:** 5 restaurants; 4 bars; shopping arcade; salon; room service (7am–10am and 5pm–1am); in-room massage; same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, cable TV, dataport, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Hotel Lifort ★ *Value* Built as a getaway for school teachers and owned by a teachers' association, this well-designed hotel looks more expensive than it is and offers comfortable rooms that are open to the public when there's space (Sat is usually fully booked). Located across from Nakajima-koen Park, it offers mostly single rooms, which are small but very nicely decorated. Deluxe twins are especially spacious, separated into living and sleeping areas, though don't expect to hang more than one suit in the shallow closet. The best views are of the park. Unfortunately, not much English is spoken here.

S10 W1, Chuo-ku, Sapporo 064-0810. ☎ 011/521-5211. Fax 011/521-5215. 195 units. June–Oct ¥7,700 (\$64) single, ¥14,100–¥19,000 (\$118–\$158) twin. Nov–May ¥6,200 (\$52) single, ¥11,400–¥17,000 (\$95–\$142) twin. MC, V. Subway: Nakajima-koen (3 min.). Take exit 1, turn right, cross the big street, and turn right again. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese/Western/Chinese); same-day laundry/dry-cleaning service; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot, hair dryer, washlet toilets (twins only).

②64 **Nakamura Ryokan** ★ If you want to stay in a ryokan, this modern and comfortable Japanese inn, just a stone's throw from the Botanic Garden, is a good choice. First opened 100 years ago but now occupying a nondescript 25-year-old building, it offers pleasant Japanese-style tatami rooms, some with a sitting area near the window. The hallways with eaves and slatted wooden doors to each room are a nice touch. Although rooms have their own tub, you might want to take advantage of the public baths here. To receive the low rates listed below, you must book in advance and mention the Japanese Inn Group. Western breakfasts are available.

N3 W7, Chuo-ku, Sapporo 060-0003. ☎ 011/241-2111. Fax 011/241-2118. 27 units. Rates for foreign guests ¥7,000 (\$58) single; ¥13,000 (\$108) double. Breakfast ¥1,500 (\$13) extra; dinner ¥3,000 (\$25) extra. AE, MC, V. Located between the entrance of the Botanic Garden and the Old Government Building. Station: Sapporo (10 min.). **Amenities:** Restaurant (Japanese); in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

Sapporo Aspen Hotel Built in 1996, this hotel has an English-speaking staff and a convenient location just north of Sapporo Station (its brochure says 100 steps, but I didn't count them). Otherwise, rooms are rather small for the price but are comfortable enough, with windows that open, heavy curtains to block light, sitting areas and desks, and plenty of counter space in bathrooms. The best views are from the west side overlooking Hokkaido University and a distant forest.

N8 W4, Kita-ku, Sapporo 060-0808. ☎ 011/700-2111. Fax 011/700-2002. info@aspen-hotel.co.jp. 302 units. ¥8,000 (\$67) single; ¥15,000 (\$125) twin. June–Sept and Snow Festival ¥10,000–¥12,000 (\$83–\$100) single, ¥19,000–¥23,000 (\$158–\$192) twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Sapporo (a 2-min. walk straight north of the station, on the left). **Amenities:** Coffee shop; rental bicycles (fee: ¥1,570/\$13 per day); concierge; in-room massage; same-day laundry service; nonsmoking rooms (reserve in advance). *In room:* A/C, TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

INEXPENSIVE

②65 **Toyoko Inn Sapporo Hokudai-mae** ★ *Finds* The motto of this inexpensive business-hotel chain translates roughly as “Eliminate unnecessary luxury

but attend to guests' needs." It does so by offering free TV movies, a VCR (there's a video-rental shop next door), free use of a lobby computer with Internet access (and free high-speed connections in rooms), special bathroom amenities for women, and little extras like semi-double or double-size beds in the mostly single rooms. The twins are great for friends traveling together (or couples who wish they weren't)—the bathroom splits the room in halves, each containing its own bed, TV, mirror, hair dryer, and more. And true to its motto, the staff is friendly. Since the hotel is located across from Hokkaido University, rooms are understandably hard to come by during February entrance exams.

4-22-7, N8, Kita-ku, Sapporo. ☎ 011/717-1045. Fax 011/717-1046. www.toyoko-inn.co.jp. 180 units. June–Sept and Snow Festival ¥6,300 – ¥6,800 (\$53–\$57) single, ¥8,800 (\$73) double or twin. Oct–May ¥4,300 – ¥4,800 (\$36–\$40) single, ¥6,800 (\$57) double or twin. AE, DC, MC, V. Station: Sapporo (3 min.). Walk straight north, turn left at the gas station, and then turn right; the hotel will be on the right, on a corner. **Amenities:** Coin-op washer and dryer; lobby computer with free Internet access; nonsmoking rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV w/free movies and VCR; high-speed dataport, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer; trouser press.

②66 **Yugiri Ryokan** Only simple Japanese-style rooms (a bit worn but comfortable) and a Japanese-style public bath are available at this ryokan near the station. Doors close at midnight and checkout is at 10am. Not much English is spoken, but surprisingly, 80% of the guests are non-Japanese.

N7 W5, Kita-ku, Sapporo 064-0807. ☎ 011/716-5482. 15 units (none with bathroom). ¥3,500 (\$29) per person double occupancy; ¥3,900 (\$32) per person single occupancy. Rates include tax. No credit cards. Station: Sapporo (north exit, 2 min.). Take an immediate left, cross the street, and turn right, then left; it's the 3rd building on the right. *In room:* TV, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Hokkaido's specialties include crab, corn on the cob, potatoes, **Genghis Khan** (a dish of mutton and vegetables that you grill yourself, also spelled "Jingisukan"), salmon, and **Ishikari Nabe** (a stew of salmon and other Hokkaido vegetables, also cooked at your table). As for Western food, your best bet is to dine in one of the many fine restaurants in Sapporo's top hotels.

Sapporo is also famous for its *ramen* (Chinese noodles), and the most popular place to eat them is on a tiny, narrow street in Susukino popularly known as **Ramen Yokochō**. Located just 1 short block east of the Susukino Station, it's an alleyway of noodle shop after noodle shop. It doesn't matter which one you choose—just look for an empty seat. Each very small shop consists of a counter and some chairs, with photos of various dishes outside the front door. Most are open daily from 11:30am to 3am. Noodles generally begin at ¥700 (\$6.30) for a steaming bowlful.

EXPENSIVE

Grand Chef ★★ FRENCH This excellent, elegantly decorated French restaurant, in Sapporo's oldest hotel and a cool oasis compared to the traffic swirling outside, specializes in Hokkaido cuisine—cooked à la Française. The menus change monthly but always include selections of steaks and seafood like scallops, salmon, or lobster. There are two sommeliers here, offering French, Italian, German, Chilean, and Japanese wines.

Sapporo Grand Hotel, N1 W4. ☎ 011/261-3311. Reservations suggested. Set dinner ¥5,000 – ¥12,000 (\$42–\$100); set lunch ¥1,800 – ¥8,000 (\$15–\$67). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm and 5–9:30pm. Station: Sapporo (8 min.).

21 Club ★★ TEPPANYAKI The 21 Club mirrors the sophistication of Hotel Arthur—sleek and elegant—and it's also Sapporo's highest spot for a meal. The views of the city, Nakajima-koen Park, and the Toyohira River are

lovely from here. If the teppanyaki dinners featuring Kobe beef are too expensive, come for one of the set lunches. Relax in the sophisticated bar-lounge before your dinner with a cocktail or after your lunch with coffee or tea. This is the kind of place where you're asked whether you want milk or lemon with your tea—and then whether you want your milk hot or cold. Perhaps a glass of wine would be more to your liking—the hotel has five wine advisers!

Hotel Arthur, 25th floor, S10 W6. ☎ **011/561-1000**. Reservations recommended. Set dinner ¥8,000 – ¥25,000 (\$67–\$208); set lunch ¥3,000 – ¥5,000 (\$25–\$42). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 5–9:30pm (last order). Subway: Namboku Line to Nakajima-koen, then exit 1 and through the park (5 min.).

Zuientei ★★ **KAISEKI** Although the Hotel Monterey Edelfhof prides itself on its turn-of-the-20th-century decor, my favorite restaurant here is this 13th-floor escape, a soothing respite with its tall ceiling, bamboo screens, and small inner garden. Although the handwritten menu is in Japanese, ordering is easy: Choose one of the kaiseki dinners that change with the seasons or, for lunch, an obento or set meal.

Hotel Monterey Edelfhof, N2 W1. ☎ **011/242-7111**. Set dinner ¥5,000 – ¥10,000 (\$42–\$83); set lunch ¥1,200 – ¥3,500 (\$10–\$29). AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 11am–2pm and 5–9pm (last order). Station: Sapporo (8 min.).

MODERATE

Hyosetsu-no-Mon **KING CRAB** A well-known restaurant that specializes in giant king crab caught in the Japan Sea north of Hokkaido, Hyosetsu-no-Mon is in Sapporo's Susukino nightlife district. Its menu (in English with photos) is easy enough—it consists almost entirely of king crab dishes. Set courses include a cooked crab, sashimi, crab soup, crab tempura, and vegetables. You can also order a la carte fried king crab claws, deep-fried king crab, tempura king crab, grilled king crab, and crabmeat chowder. Each floor has different seating arrangements, from tables to tatami; the best is the sixth floor where you sit on tatami in a dining hall reminiscent of an old Kabuki theater (open from 5pm). Here you'll be treated to a performance of traditional and contemporary dances, a bit corny in parts but popular with the mostly middle-aged set. Shows start between 7 and 8pm and cost ¥630 (\$5.25) in addition to dinner.

S5 W2 (next to Sluggers Batting Stadium). ☎ **011/521-3046**. Reservations recommended for 6th floor. Set meal ¥2,500 – ¥12,000 (\$21–\$100). MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm. Subway: Susukino (2 min.).

②67 **Kita-no-fuji** *Finds* **CHANKO NABE** Located in the heart of the Susukino nightlife district, this restaurant specializes in the famous hearty stews favored by sumo wrestlers, *chanko nabe*. After putting your shoes in one of the lockers with famous wrestlers' names on them, you'll be led by kimono-clad waitresses to your table or tatami. The center of the restaurant is dominated by a sumo ring with a bear in it (your guess is as good as mine); sumo wrestler's large handprints are on the walls. As for the nabe, which you'll cook at your table, there's a picture menu but your best bet is to tell them how much you want to spend per person. The more expensive nabe features crab, with prices beginning at ¥2,700 (\$23). Unfortunately, the staff in this busy nightspot has no time for cordiality, but this is definitely a unique place to dine.

S7 W4. ☎ **011/512-5484** or 011/512-1339 for reservations. Reservations suggested in winter. Chanko nabe ranges from ¥2,000 – ¥3,000 (\$17–\$25); if you want nabe with crab, you'll pay ¥2,700 (\$23) and up. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 4–11pm. Subway: Susukino (7 min.). Beside a disco with a Mayan-like facade; look for the sumo pictures.

②68 **Palace Toriyoshi** ★ *Finds* **YAKITORI/VARIED** In a building filled with restaurants and bars in the Susukino nightlife district, this tiny restaurant serves yakitori with a twist, including many original creations by owner/chef Mr.

Okuyama. How about cherry tomatoes covered in cheese; lotus root; a small onion filled with minced chicken; tofu salad; or eggplant with minced meat? Since the menu is in Japanese, the best strategy is to tell the waiter what you like to eat and how much you want to spend; Mr. Okuyama will fix a meal to suit your budget. For ¥2,500 (\$21), I had sashimi, seven yakitori and original skewers, salad, one of the best savory custards I've ever eaten, and soba.

Japanland Building, 2F (2nd floor). S5 W5. ☎ 011-521-2002. Reservations recommended. Yakitori ¥150 – ¥400 (\$1.25–\$3.35); set meal ¥2,500 – ¥6,000 (\$21–\$50). MC, V. Mon–Sat 5–11pm (to 10pm national holidays). Subway: Susukino (3 min.).

INEXPENSIVE

②69 **Napoli no daidokoro** ITALIAN This inexpensive basement eatery, decorated with murals but with exposed, silver-encased ductwork up above, is popular with young women for its cheap pasta. The Japanese menu with photos lists more than a dozen spaghetti choices, such as chicken and mushrooms with a spicy tomato sauce, and—my favorite—a very spicy eggplant and minced meat. For a little more, you can add a trip to the salad bar.

S1 W1. ☎ 011/231-2035. Spaghetti ¥680 – ¥880 (\$5.65–\$7.35); set lunch ¥750 – ¥950 (\$6.25–\$7.90). V. Mon–Sat 11am–10:30pm; Sun 11am–10pm. Station: Odori (1 min.). East across the street from Marui department store; look for the tiny orange, white, and green sign.

Sapporo Beer Garden ★ GENGHIS KHAN/BAR FOOD I can't imagine going to Sapporo without dropping by the Sapporo Beer Garden beside the historic Sapporo Beer Museum. Go for a late tour and then stay for dinner; or, if it's winter or early in the day when the beer garden is closed, dine in the Sapporo Beer Hall, an old ivy-covered brick building built in 1889 as the Sapporo brewery. I personally prefer the second floor's Kessel Hall, where you dine underneath a huge old mash tub once used in brewing beer. For snacks, you can order dishes a la carte like Japanese-style fried chicken, sausage, fried potato, or boiled soybeans (*edamame*), but the specialty of the house is Genghis Khan, which you cook yourself on a hot skillet at your table. The best deal in the house is the appropriately named King Viking, which for ¥3,400 (\$28) gives you as much Genghis Khan and as much draft beer as you can consume in 100 minutes. Otherwise, for all you timid drinkers, draft beer starts at ¥490 (\$4.10) for a small mug.

Sapporo Beer Museum, N7 E9. ☎ 011/742-1531. Reservations not required. All-you-can-eat Genghis Khan ¥2,400 (\$20). AE, DC, MC, V. Garden July–Aug Mon–Sat 5–9pm, Sun noon–3pm and 4–9pm. Beer Hall daily 11:30am–10pm. Taxi: 5 min. from Sapporo Station. Bus: See "Sapporo Beer Museum," on p. 588.

Taj Mahal *(Value)* INDIAN This very good, second-floor Indian restaurant tries too hard with its Indian mirrored fabrics, brass lamps, Indian music, and Japanese staff in Indian dress (the cooks are Indian), as the food alone is reason enough to come here. The service is friendly and the choices are varied—in addition to tandoori and kabobs, they serve chicken, lamb, fish, seafood, and vegetable curries (but no pork or beef). Tasty lunch specials are served until 3pm, but not on Sundays or holidays.

N2 W3. ☎ 011/231-8850. Main dishes ¥850 – ¥2,450 (\$7.10–\$20); set dinner ¥1,380 – ¥5,200 (\$12–\$43); set lunch ¥580 – ¥1,400 (\$4.85–\$12). AE, DC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–3pm and 5:30–10pm (last order); Sat–Sun 11am–10pm. Station: Sapporo (6 min.). Walk south on Eki-mae Dori and turn left when you see JAL and JTB to the right; it's catty-corner from the post office.

4 Noboribetsu Spa & Shikotsu-Toya National Park

If you have only a couple days to spare to visit one of Hokkaido's national parks, head to **Shikotsu-Toya National Park** ★★, the closest to Sapporo and the first

national park you'll reach if you enter Hokkaido via train to Hakodate. This 987-sq.-km (381-sq.-mile) national park encompasses lakes, volcanoes, and the famous hot-spring resort of **Noboribetsu Onsen** ★★, home to 1,000 people.

Famous for the variety of its hot-water springs ever since the first public bathhouse opened here in 1858, Noboribetsu Spa is one of Japan's best-known spa resorts and is the most popular of Hokkaido's many spa towns. It boasts 11 different types of hot water (each with a different mineral content) and gushes 10,000 tons a day. With temperatures ranging between 113°F (45°C) and 197°F (92°C), the waters contain all kinds of minerals, including sulfur, salt, iron, and gypsum, and are thought to help relieve such disorders as high blood pressure, poor blood circulation, rheumatism, arthritis, eczema, and even constipation.

Also known for its seasonal beauty, Noboribetsu is an impressive sight in spring, when 2,000 cherry trees lining the road into the onsen are in full bloom. In autumn, thousands of Japanese maples burst into flame. In the nearby village of **Shiraoi** on Lake Poroto, a museum and village commemorate the native Ainu and their culture.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE Noboribetsu Onsen is about a 15-minute **bus** ride (¥330/\$2.75; departures three or more times an hour) from the town of Noboribetsu and **Noboribetsu Station**, which is where you'll arrive if you come by train. Noboribetsu Station lies on the main **JR train** line that runs between Hakodate and Sapporo, a little more than 2 hours from Hakodate and 1 hour and 10 minutes from Sapporo. Fares for an unreserved seat are ¥3,850 (\$32) from Sapporo, ¥6,190 (\$52) from Hakodate.

There are also **direct buses** from Sapporo Station to Noboribetsu Onsen departing every half-hour or so and costing ¥1,900 (\$16) for the 2½-hour trip. Contact the **Hokkaido Chuo Bus Company** (☎ 011/231-0500) for more information.

VISITOR INFORMATION & GETTING AROUND The **Noboribetsu Tourist Association** (☎ 0143/84-3311; open daily 9am–6pm) is on Noboribetsu Onsen's main street, just a minute's walk north of the bus depot (turn left out of

Tips Un-Bearable Park

As you wander around Noboribetsu Onsen, you'll see advertisements for a bear park and an Ainu village attraction. The best thing about this place is the trip via ropeway—the bear park occupies one of the tallest hills around. The 160 or so bears, however, are crowded together in concrete pens in one of the saddest sights I've ever seen, and the Ainu "village" is mainly for souvenirs. Although the bears, many of them rescued from extermination or brought here as orphaned cubs, are luckier than some of their peers (government policy advocated the extermination of Hokkaido brown bears in the 1950s and still allows 300 of the estimated 2,000 remaining wild bears to be hunted and culled annually), the admission of ¥2,520 (\$21) is too high a price for this joyless place. Skip it—you're better off spending your money elsewhere. Or donate money for a cause: Dedicated employees bent on saving brown bears here have begun a non-profit organization in hopes of moving the bears off the mountain to a place where there's more room.

the depot; it will be on your left side). Available are a pamphlet, a map in English, and hot-springs information, but you may not encounter anyone who speaks English. Luckily, the town is so small you shouldn't have any problem getting around.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

ENJOYING NOBORIBETSU'S NATURAL WONDERS

TAKING THE LOCAL WATERS Although all the spa hotels and ryokan have their own taps into the spring water, almost everyone who comes to Noboribetsu Onsen makes a point of going to the most famous hotel bath in town, **Daiichi Takimotokan** (♠♠) (☎ 0143/84-2111), one of the first bathhouses to open at the hot springs. Now a huge, modern bathing hall with some 10 pools containing different mineral contents at various temperatures, it's an elaborate affair with hot-spring baths both indoors and out, indoor and outdoor Jacuzzis, saunas, steam rooms, and waterfall massage (this is one of my favorites—you sit under the shooting water and let it pummel your neck and shoulders). Although the baths are separate for men and women, there's an indoor swimming pool for families with a slide and play area for children, so be sure to bring your swimsuit. If you're staying at the Daiichi Takimotokan hotel (see "Where to Stay," below), you can use the baths for free at any time—in the evenings, don't miss bathing in the outdoor baths, where you can order beer, soft drinks, or sake and enjoy the nice mountain scenery. Otherwise, Daiichi Takimotokan is open to the public daily from 9am to 6pm (you must enter by 5pm); the charge is ¥2,000 (\$17) for adults, half price for children 3 to 12.

(270) **Sagiriyu** (☎ 0143/84-2050) is Noboribetsu Onsen's public bathhouse. Located on the main street next to the Tourist Information Office, it offers two types of hot-spring waters, a whirlpool bath, and a sauna (but unfortunately no outdoor bath). Taking the waters and sauna here costs ¥390 (\$3.25) for adults and ¥170 (\$1.40) for children. It's open daily from 7am to 10pm.

HELL VALLEY (Jigokudani) (♠) To get an idea of what all this hot water looks like, visit Hell Valley at the north edge of town past the Daiichi Takimotokan hotel (see "Where to Stay," below). A volcanic crater 446m (1,485 ft.) in diameter, the huge depression is full of bubbling, boiling water and rock formations of orange and brown. As you walk the concrete path that winds along the left side of the crater (called Hell Valley Promenade), keep an eye down below to the right for a tiny shrine dedicated to the deity that protects eyes (those most in need are apt to miss it); local lore says that if you rub some of the protective water over ailing eyes, they'll be cured. Farther along, you'll soon reach a sign for OYUNAMA and a path leading uphill to the left through lush woods; if you follow it for about 10 minutes, you'll come to a lookout point over a large pond of hot bubbling water called Oyunama (the lookout is across the highway; it's another 5-min. walk to the pond). If you want to take a different route back, follow the path to the right just as you recross the highway. This pathway, called Funamiya (or Mount Funami) Promenade, traces the backbone of several ridges all the way back into town, passing a number of small stone guardians. If you follow it for 25 minutes to the end (where it's a bit overgrown and neglected), you'll end up in front of Oyado Kiyomizu-ya ryokan (see "Where to Stay," below). But the path diverges at several points, and if you take the wrong path you'll end up at—Hell Valley.

ESPECIALLY FOR KIDS

In addition to the two theme parks listed below (which you can see on a joint, discounted ticket available only to foreigners), there's a Bear Park with 160 brown bears crowded into a cement enclosure: It's very sad; skip it.

Edo Wonderland Noboribetsu (Jidai-mura) ★★ *Kids* A visit to this reproduction of a Feudal-Era village is the closest you can get to taking a time machine back to the last days of the Edo Period. Shops, restaurants, theaters, the downtown, and a samurai district are built as they were of yore, staffed by people dressed in period clothing. See Ninja warriors fighting in a trick mansion, local merchants hawking their wares, Edo-Era tenements with life-size models, and courtesans performing in this Disney-esque re-creation of how Japan might have looked when the shogun reigned. Although shows are in Japanese (the Ninja show is probably the only one that would interest children), the various attractions are fun for the whole family, and if you haven't seen another historic theme village elsewhere in Japan, this rather small one is worth a 2-hour visit. To commemorate the day forever, you can don a kimono, samurai, or Ninja outfit and have your photo taken in front of a traditional backdrop for ¥2,100 (\$18)

53-1 Nakanoboribetsu, Noboribetsu-shi. ☎ 0143/83-3311. Admission ¥3,500 (\$29) adults, ¥1,800 (\$15) children. **Tip:** A foreigners-only combination discount ticket allowing admission to both Jidai-mura and Marine Park Nixe (see below) costs ¥3,000 (\$25) for adults, ¥1,800 (\$15) for children. Apr-Oct daily 9am-5pm; Nov-Mar Thurs-Tues 10am-4pm. Bus: From Noboribetsu Onsen or JR Noboribetsu Station to Edo Wonderland/Jidai-mura.

Noboribetsu Marine Park Nixe ★ *Kids* Small children love this combination Danish theme park and aquarium, located near Noboribetsu Station. (If you're traveling with luggage, lockers are available both here and at the station.) The aquarium, one of the largest in northern Japan, is in Castle Nixe, modeled after a Danish castle (and visible from the station), where you'll see sharks, rays, salmon, sturgeon, king crab, frogs, turtles, and other sea creatures. More attractions include a dolphin show, a king penguin parade, a sea lion show, a game arcade, the ubiquitous souvenir shops (selling Danish and aquarium-related gifts), and a handful of kiddie rides (which cost ¥200-¥300/\$1.65-\$2.50 extra). You can see everything in about 2 hours.

1-22 Noboribetsu Higashi-machi, Noboribetsu-shi. ☎ 0143/83-3800. Admission ¥2,300 (\$19) adults, ¥1,150 (\$9.60) children. A foreigners-only combination discount ticket allowing passport admission to both Jidai-mura (see above) and Marine Park Nixe costs ¥3,000 (\$25) for adults and ¥1,800 (\$15) for children. Daily 9am-5pm. Station: Noboribetsu (a 7-min. walk from the station; walk straight out the exit and turn right after 1 block).

LEARNING ABOUT THE AINU IN NEARBY SHIRAOI

Poroto Kotan and the Ainu Museum ★ Shiraoi (an Ainu word meaning "Place of Many Horseflies") was settled by the Ainu long before the Japanese arrived; today, it's a small town of some 22,000 inhabitants, including Ainu. Poroto Kotan means "Big Lake Village" in Ainu, and nestled on the shores of Lake Poroto is a mock village of native houses made entirely from wood and reeds, a native plant garden, a dance area, probably the most important Ainu museum anywhere, and a research center dedicated to preserving Ainu culture.

After passing, regrettably, through a huge souvenir hall, you'll find yourself surrounded by traditionally built houses, where there are demonstrations of Ainu weaving techniques, woodworking, and other crafts, and where native dances are performed by Ainu in traditional costume. Unfortunately, bears (and dogs) are kept in captivity here in filthy metal cages, but even this is an Ainu tradition—in spring, when the mother bear left her cave in search of food, Ainu fetched the cubs to keep in a wooden cage in the village until they were old enough for slaughter. Bears were revered as gifts from the gods. The most important thing to see, however, is the museum, with English-language descriptions

Another Island, Another People: The Ainu of Hokkaido

Hokkaido is home to the Ainu, a people who are the native inhabitants of Japan's northernmost island. Not much is known about their origins; it's not even clear whether they're Asian or Caucasian, but they are of different racial stock than the Japanese. They're round-eyed and light-skinned, and Ainu males can grow thick beards and mustaches.

The Ainu arrived in Hokkaido approximately 800 years ago. Living in a harsh environment with few resources, they were skilled at using the plants and animals around them for everything from medicine to utensils. With no metal at their disposal, they carved arrows with wooden "knives" and then dipped them in poison to increase their efficiency. Clothes were fashioned from bark, wild rye, or even salmon skin. Traditionally, they lived as hunters and fishermen, using dogs to help in the hunt and setting up trip traps with arrows to catch wild animals. Animistic, they had gods for every object and phenomenon, whether sun, thunder, fire, or animals. Most important to Ainu culture were bear cubs, kept in captivity before being killed, with elaborate ceremonies held to send the cub's spirit to the next life. To avoid attention from demons, babies were dressed in old clothing and given temporary names like "small excrement" until they were 2 or 3 years old. Girls were tattooed around their lips, arms, and hands beginning at age 12 and were considered ready for marriage by the time they were 15 or 16.

After Hokkaido was opened for development in the late 1800s, the Ainu were forcibly assimilated into Japanese society, and many died with the spread of smallpox, measles, cholera, and other newly introduced diseases. Like Native Americans, they were often discriminated against, and their culture was largely destroyed. Hunting and fishing were prohibited, and male Ainu were taken from their families for forced labor. Eventually, the Ainu took Japanese names and adopted the Japanese language and clothing. Today, there are an estimated 23,000 Ainu still living in Hokkaido. Some of them earn their living from tourism, selling Ainu wood carvings and other crafts as well as performing traditional dances and songs.

of Ainu history, culture, society, and traditions, and displays of utensils, clothing, jewelry, and other everyday artifacts.

If you wish, you can lunch on dried salmon, potato cakes, and herb tea bought from one of the stalls. Otherwise, although the village is small and can be toured in about an hour, it's an important stop for those wishing to learn about Ainu culture and the indigenous people who have little left of what was once a rich heritage.

2-3-4 Wakakusa-cho, Shiraoi-cho, Hokkaido 059-0902. ☎ 0144/82-3914. Admission ¥750 (\$6.25) adults, ¥550 (\$4.60) high-school students, ¥450 (\$3.75) junior-high students, ¥300 (\$2.50) children. Apr–Oct daily 8:45am–5pm; Nov–Mar daily 8:45am–4:30pm. Closed 1 week for New Year's. Train: JR train 25 min. from JR Noboribetsu Station to JR Shiraoi Station, then a 15-min. walk; walk out to the traffic signal, turn left, and then turn left again at the next light. Cross the tracks; it's on your right. **Note:** Not all trains running between Hakodate and Sapporo (with stops at Noboribetsu Station) stop at Shiraoi, so make sure yours does.

WHERE TO STAY

The busiest tourist seasons are July through September and during New Year's, which are when hotel rates are at their highest, particularly on weekends. October, when the leaves are changing, is also popular. With the exception of Kikusui, all the places below charge a daily ¥150 (\$1.25) hot-springs tax.

EXPENSIVE

(271) Oyado Kiyomizu-ya ★★ You'll be made to feel welcome at this elegantly modern ryokan with traditional touches, one of our favorites in Hokkaido. After entering the front gate, you'll be ushered down a long corridor decorated with plants, stones, and paper lanterns to the elevator that will whisk you up to your room. Cheapest are average-looking Western-style rooms, making the simple but pleasant Japanese tatami rooms a better choice. For a splurge, combination rooms are actually two-room suites with a tatami room where you'll dine and a separate bedroom. The ryokan is beside a roaring river, the sounds of which will sing you to sleep as you snuggle against fur-lined futons (which cost an astounding \$1,000 each!) and down covers. But it's the delicious and abundant seasonal kaiseki meals served in your room that assure the ryokan many repeat guests; the parade of beautifully prepared dishes includes local specialties. Service, as can be expected, is impeccable, and the second-generation owner, Mr. Iwai, speaks excellent English; he can answer your questions regarding Noboribetsu and the surrounding area. (A sake connoisseur, he can also recommend which of the 14 different kinds of sake he keeps on hand might go best with your meal.) If you're looking for a place far from tour groups, souvenir shops, and impersonal service, you'll be happy here.

173 Noboribetsu Onsen-machi, Noboribetsu-shi, Hokkaido 059-0551. ☎ **0143/84-2145**. Fax 0143/84-2146. 43 units. ¥10,000 (\$83) single; ¥16,000 (\$133) double; ¥24,000 (\$200) triple. Breakfast ¥2,000 (\$17) extra; dinner ¥5,000–¥10,000 (\$42–\$83) extra. AE, DC, MC, V. The staff will pick you up at the station if you tell them your arrival time in advance; otherwise, it's above Noboribetsu Onsen's main street, a 10-min. walk from the bus terminal. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; karaoke bar; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths (the outdoor bath alternates days for men and women); in-room massage. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea.

MODERATE

Daiichi Takimotokan ★ Thanks to its long history and gigantic public baths with various pools, this is Noboribetsu Onsen's best-known ryokan. Opened in 1858 as the area's first inn and now in its fifth generation of innkeepers (a 30-something woman and probably Japan's youngest female general manager), it remains Noboribetsu's oldest accommodations, though now it's a large, modern facility with little personality and lots of noisy tour groups. Still, the most compelling reasons to stay here are its location near Hell Valley and its hot-spring baths, which hotel guests are entitled to use free anytime, night or day. Another plus: free shuttle bus service November through March from Chitose Airport in Sapporo and throughout the year from downtown Sapporo (call the hotel for reservations). As for rooms, most are simple tatami (only 10 are Western-style), with repeat guests usually preferring the west wing (though glazed windows make them a bit dark and in-room meals are not available). Meals are served in a large dining room offering a Japanese, Chinese, and Western buffet or, at slightly higher prices, they are served in some of the Japanese-style rooms.

55 Noboribetsu Onsen-machi, Noboribetsu-shi, Hokkaido 059-0595. ☎ **0143/84-2111**. Fax 0143/84-2202. www.takimotokan.co.jp. 399 units (342 with bathroom, 57 with toilet only). ¥10,000–¥25,000 (\$83–\$208) per person; peak season, Sat, and holiday evenings ¥2,000 (\$17) extra. Rates include 2 meals. DC, MC, V. A 5-min. walk uphill from the bus station, beside Hell Valley. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; Japanese and Chinese noodle shops; 2 bars; disco; indoor swimming pool (free for hotel guests); indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; shopping arcade; in-room massage; laundry/dry-cleaning service. *In room:* TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

(272) Kashotei Hanaya ★ This is one of the most refined members of the Japanese Inn Group ryokan, modern but with such traditional touches as a small Japanese garden off the lobby, flower arrangements, bamboo, decorative floors, and Japanese music playing softly in public areas. Most rooms are Japanese style, with or without bathroom, while the three Western-style rooms are without bathroom (all rooms, however, have toilet and sink). Meals are served in your room. The owner speaks English. The ryokan is on the edge of town, about a 5-minute walk from the bus terminal.

134 Noboribetsu Onsen-machi, Noboribetsu-shi, Hokkaido 059-0551. ☎ **0143/84-2521**. Fax 0143/84-2240. www4.ocn.ne.jp/~k-hanaya. 22 units (5 with bathroom, 17 with toilet only). ¥7,000–¥7,500 (\$58–\$63) single with toilet only; ¥12,000 (\$100) double with toilet only, ¥20,000 (\$167) double with bathroom. Japanese or Western breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra; dinner ¥2,500–¥7,500 (\$21–\$63) extra. AE, V. Bus: From Noboribetsu Station to Byoin-mae/Kashotei Hanaya-mae (if you're arriving by bus, you'll get off before reaching the terminal—ask the bus driver to let you know where—the ryokan will be a stone's throw behind you, across the road). Pickup service also available from Noboribetsu Onsen bus terminal. **Amenities:** Coffee shop; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths (open round the clock); in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea.

INEXPENSIVE

Takimoto Inn If you prefer a hotel with beds to a ryokan with futons, this quiet and moderately priced hotel has the additional advantage of allowing guests to use Daiichi Takimotokan's famous baths across the street for free. All the rooms are twins (but can be used as singles or triples) and are fairly basic, with small bathrooms. There's no view, but windows do open. Buffet breakfasts and dinners offer a mix of Japanese and Western food.

76 Noboribetsu Onsen-machi, Noboribetsu-shi 059-0551. ☎ **0143/84-2205**. Fax 0143/84-2645. 47 units. Off season ¥6,000–¥8,000 (\$50–\$67) per person. Sat and peak season ¥2,000 (\$17) extra; New Year's, Golden Week, and mid-Aug ¥3,000–¥4,000 (\$25–\$33) extra. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, V. A 5-min. walk uphill from the bus station, across the street from Daiichi Takimotokan. **Amenities:** Restaurant; hot-spring bath (guests can use Daiichi Takimotokan's baths for free); in-room massage. *In room:* TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

(273) Fukuan SOBA This small, traditional soba shop serves its own buckwheat noodles. Since the menu is in Japanese only, I recommend ordering the *Tenseiro*, a tempura soba meal with shrimp and vegetables; or the *Ebi-tenzaroshi* soba, a summertime meal of cold soba, shrimp tempura, seaweed, dried fish flakes, and Japanese daikon radish. Or look around at what others are eating. The leg wells are saviors for those errant legs that just won't fit under low Japanese tables.

30 Noboribetsu Onsen-machi. ☎ **0143/84/2758**. Soba ¥680–¥1,200 (\$5.65–\$10). MC, V. Daily 11:30am–2pm and 6–11pm. A 1-min. walk from the bus terminal, on the main street across from the tourist information office.

Poplar Restaurant WESTERN If you find yourself looking for a place to stop for lunch, a draft beer, or coffee, try this restaurant, which serves inexpensive Western dishes. While they may not win any culinary awards, items on the Japanese menu with pictures include beefsteak, hamburger steak, fried shrimp, grilled salmon, grilled pork with ginger sauce, chicken stew, curry rice, shrimp gratin, and spaghetti.

Takimoto Inn. ☎ **0143/84-2205**. Main dishes ¥650–¥900 (\$5.40–\$7.50); set meal ¥1,100–¥2,500 (\$9.15–\$21). AE, DC, V. Daily 11am–2pm (last order). A 5-min. walk from the bus terminal, near Hell Valley and across from Daiichi Takimotokan.

(274) Tokumitsu ★ SUSHI This is a friendly, local hangout where you'll be served good, reasonably priced dishes while sitting at the long sushi counter or

on tatami. A plastic-food display will help you order dishes like *Chirashi sushi* (raw fish served over a bed of seasoned rice), *unagi* (eel), or *kani-nabe* (a crab stew you cook yourself), all priced at ¥1,500 (\$13). Tokumitsu stays open late as a nightcap spot for locals and tourists alike.

29 Chuo-dori. ☎ 0143/84-2079. Sushi and sashimi platters ¥700–¥1,800 (\$5.90–\$15); set meal ¥1,000–¥1,800 (\$8.35–\$15). No credit cards. Daily 11am–2pm and 4:30pm–midnight. A 1-min. walk from the bus terminal, on the main street across from the tourist office.

5 Sounkyo Spa & Daisetsuzan National Park

Although I find it difficult to rank nature in terms of beauty, there are some who maintain that **Daisetsuzan National Park** ★★ is the most spectacular of Hokkaido's parks. With its tall mountains covered with fir and birch trees and sprinkled with wildflowers, and its river gorge laced with waterfalls and hiking trails, Daisetsuzan National Park is the perfect place to come if you've been itching to get some exercise in relatively unspoiled countryside. Lying in the center of Hokkaido (east of Sapporo), this national park—Japan's largest—contains three volcanic mountain groups, including the highest mountain in Hokkaido, Mount Asahi, 2,254m (7,513 ft.) high. Hiking in summer and skiing in winter are the primary pursuits of the park's visitors.

Nestled at the very edge of Sounkyo Gorge, Daisetsuzan's most famous natural attraction, is **Sounkyo Onsen** ★ (*onsen* means “spa” in Japanese), the perfect base for exploring the national park. Once rather unattractive with a hodgepodge of ugly cement buildings, Sounkyo has reinvented itself with attractive and compatible alpine-style buildings and stone and wood paths that do justice to the magnificent scenic backdrop and its soothing hot springs. Yet it remains a mountain village, home to 600 residents and only a dozen or so accommodations, most of them small affairs. More important, Sounkyo Spa serves as the starting point for bicycle trips along Sounkyo Gorge and for the cable-car trip to the top of a neighboring peak with its hiking trails. In February, it's the scene of the Ice Falls Festival, a winter fantasyland with giant ice castles, frozen waterfalls lit with colored lights, and weekend fireworks. Need I add that Sounkyo is one of my favorite places in all of Hokkaido?

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE The only way to reach Sounkyo Onsen by public transportation is by **bus**. If you're coming from Sapporo, take the **JR train** 2½ hours to Kamikawa (¥5,670/\$42 one-way), transferring there for the 30-minute bus ride (¥770/\$6.40 one-way) directly to Sounkyo Onsen. Buses depart about 14 times a day and generally connect with train arrivals, but it's always wise to check ahead with the tourist information center in Sapporo.

There are two buses a day—called the Sunrise Asahikawa-Kushiro-go—connecting Sounkyo Onsen with Akanko Onsen in Akan National Park (see the next section for more on Akan), with the one-way fare costing ¥3,260 (\$27) for the 3½-hour trip. (Reservations are required; call ☎ 01658/5-3321 in Sounkyo or ☎ 0154/67-2205 in Akan; or drop by the bus terminal in either town.) All bus fares are half price for children.

VISITOR INFORMATION & ORIENTATION The **tourist information office** (☎ 01658/5-3350; open daily 10:30am–5pm) is located inside the bus terminal on the right-hand side. The window is not marked in English, and spoken English is limited, but the staff can point you in the direction of your lodging or even make reservations for you. They also have a brochure in English

describing the national park and its attractions, as well as a brochure about Mount Kurodake and its hiking paths. In any case, the village is so tiny that you won't have any difficulty getting around; it's basically two streets leading up to the ropeway, and a pedestrian lane called Canyon Mall Street that wanders through the center of town (nicknamed Hot Hut). More information on Daisetsuzan National Park is available online at <http://daisetsu.or.jp/e-index.html>.

EXPLORING SOUNKYO ONSEN

Before exploring the environs, you might want to pop into Sounkyo's **Daisetsuzan National Park Visitor Center**, located next to the ropeway (☎ 01658/9-4400), with displays on the park's animals, plants, and geological wonders. Unfortunately, displays are in Japanese, though an English-language handout offers rudimentary explanations, and a video shows the park's changes through the seasons. If you plan on hiking, you might ask the staff at the information counter for more details on the "Guide to Mountain Climbing" exhibit, as it alerts hikers to places brown bears are often spotted. The center is open June through September 8am to 6pm, and October through May 9am to 5pm; November through June, it's closed on Monday.

BICYCLING THE SOUNKYO GORGE ★ The Sounkyo Gorge is a river valley hemmed in on both sides by rock walls rising almost 150m (500 ft.). Almost perpendicular in places, the gorge extends for about 19km (12 miles), offering spectacular views with each bending curve. The best way to see part of the gorge is to **bicycle** (unfortunately, a permanent rock slide prohibits cyclists from seeing the whole gorge), which you can do in about an hour or so. From Sounkyo, the first part of the trip is along a sidewalk next to a highway strung with cars. The highway winds along a rushing river past a couple of waterfalls until it finally disappears into a dark tunnel (where it belongs). From this point, the gorge belongs to cyclists and hikers and becomes quite narrow. I find this a glorious ride, especially on fine days, and look forward to it every time I come to Sounkyo Onsen. I only wish the ride were longer, especially since bicycles, available for rent at Akahotsu Enterprise at the Sounkyo bus terminal (☎ 01658-3305), cost ¥1,500 (\$13) regardless of whether you keep them for 1 hour or a whole day. Bikes are available for rent daily from 6am to 6pm, from Golden Week (end of Apr) to October.

GOING TO THE TOP OF MOUNT KURODAKE ★ If you're interested in hiking, or even if you're not, take the **cable car** directly from Sounkyo Onsen to the lofty peak of Mount Kurodake. The trip takes 7 minutes, and round-trip tickets cost ¥1,650 (\$14) for adults and ¥850 (\$7.10) for children. From the cable-car station, walk a few minutes farther up the mountain, where you'll come to a chairlift. The chairlift ride (my favorite part) takes 10 minutes, swinging you past lush forests of fir and birch. Round-trip fare is ¥600 (\$5) for adults and ¥400 (\$3.35) for children. Ropeway and lift operating hours vary; in summer it's 6am to 7pm, in winter it's 9am to 4pm (call ☎ 01658/5-3031 for more information).

Day Hikes At the end of the lift, where the hiking paths begin, there's a hut to the left where you sign your name and give your route so that tabs can be kept on people who are on the mountain. You can also rent rubber boots here for ¥500 (\$4.15), a must if you don't have hiking boots, since trails are slippery and wet (small streams from winter snows cascade down the trail even in July). Note that rental sizes only go up to 28 centimeters (11½ in.). If you're not feeling

overly ambitious but are prepared to exert yourself climbing over boulders, you can reach the peak of **Kurodake**, 1,950m (6,500 ft.) high, in about 1½ hours. There, if the weather is clear, you'll be rewarded with views of the surrounding mountain ranges. If you feel like taking a day hike, there's a circular path along the top of mountain ridges that you can hike in about 8 hours. (Be sure to get a map at the tourist information office and note lift operating hours.) The tops of the mountains are really beautiful here, covered with wildflowers and alpine plant life. It would be a shame to come to Sounkyo and not spend a few hours amid its lofty peaks.

SKIING From November to May, the mountain becomes a skier's haven, especially for beginners (advanced skiers won't find the slopes here very challenging). Although you can rent skis up on the mountain at the cable-car station, keep in mind that your feet may be too big (at last check, boots went up to 27cm/10½ in.). Skis and boots (for adults) rent for ¥3,150 (\$26), while a 1-day cable-car and chairlift ticket goes for ¥3,600 (\$30) for adults and ¥2,100 (\$18) for children.

TAKING THE WATERS In the village Hot Hut Community Center, you'll find **Spa Kurodake** (☎ 01658/5-3333), a public hot-spring bath with large, spotless, and attractive indoor and outdoor baths plus a sauna. The spa charges ¥600 (\$5) for adults (half price for children) and is open 10am to 9pm in summer and 11am to 8pm in winter (closed Wed Nov–Apr). Buy your tickets at the entrance's vending machine.

WHERE TO STAY

There are plenty of inexpensive pensions and hotels in Sounkyo. The army of college-age Japanese you see working in the area comes from other parts of Japan to work for the summer. They may not know a lot about the area, but most of them speak some English.

At all of the accommodations with hot-spring baths, you'll pay a hot-spring tax of ¥150 (\$1.25) in addition to the usual government tax. If you want to stay here in August, be sure to make advance reservations.

MODERATE

(275) Ginsenkaku ★ Opened in 1998 in the heart of Hot Hut, this modern, functional ryokan offers convenience and rather ordinary Japanese-style rooms with small bathrooms. Except during busy peak periods, Japanese meals are served in your room; buffet breakfasts in a communal dining room offer Japanese and Western choices.

Sounkyo Onsen, Kamikawacho, Kamikawa-gun 078-1701. ☎ 01658/5-3003. Fax 01658/5-3121. 36 units. Summer ¥12,000–¥13,500 (\$100–\$125) per person; off season ¥7,000–¥8,000 (\$58–\$67) per person. Rates include 2 meals. MC, V. A 4-min. walk from the bus terminal. **Amenities:** Restaurant (Western); bar; lounge; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; in-room massage. *In room:* TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet.

Taisetsu Hotel ★★ *Value* Although it's the farthest walk from the bus terminal, this hotel's ridge-top location above town gives it good views of the surrounding gorge and mountains. What makes this a top pick, however, are its gorgeous baths, of which there are three (open 24 hr.). Best are the seventh-floor indoor and outdoor baths with great views, and the new outdoor baths overlooking expansive greenery. As for rooms, most are Japanese-style, and since prices are the same no matter which way they face, ask for a room on a top floor facing the gorge (avoid the hotel's two twins; they have no view). The best rooms are in the west wing (ask for a room on the 4th to 6th floors facing the river).

Since guests who stay in the west wing are expected to dine in their rooms, you'll have to pay ¥2,000 (\$17) extra per person for the privilege. Guests in other parts of the hotel will dine in one of two restaurants, one serving Japanese set meals and the other serving a blend of Japanese and Western cuisine. Breakfasts are served buffet style with both Western and Japanese food.

Sounkyo Onsen, Kamikawacho, Kamikawa-gun 078-1701. ☎ 01658/5-3211. Fax 01658/5-3420. www.taisetsu-g.com. 231 units (219 with bathroom; 12 with toilet only). ¥15,000–¥19,000 (\$125–\$160) per person. Off-season rates ¥2,000 (\$17) less per person. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. An 8-min. walk from the bus terminal. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (Japanese, combination Japanese/Western, coffee shop); 1 Japanese-style pub; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; sauna; whirlpool baths; in-room massage. *In room:* TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, safe, washlet toilet (west wing only).

INEXPENSIVE

Northern Lodge ★ This small and personable European-style lodge invites you into its cozy living room complete with fireplace, English-speaking staff, and spotless, mostly Japanese-style rooms, though there are a few twins with down quilts and sofas. The bathrooms are small but you'll probably want to go to the public hot-spring baths anyway, which use fences for privacy, above which are views of soaring mountains. The communal dining room, decorated with natural wood, offers both European (Swiss fondue) and Japanese cuisine, as well as a buffet breakfast. If you're here for the winter Ice Falls Festival, be sure to ask for a room on the fourth or fifth floor facing the river.

Sounkyo Onsen, Kamikawacho, Kamikawa-gun 078-1701. ☎ 01658/5-3231. Fax 01658/5-3021. 36 units. Summer ¥11,000 (\$92) per person; off season ¥9,000 (\$75) per person. Rates include 2 meals. MC, V. A 1-min. walk from the bus terminal, across the footbridge over the river and up the hill. **Amenities:** Indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; rental bikes (¥1,000/\$8.35 per day); gift shop; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* TV, fridge, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

Onsen Pension Ginga ★ *Value* Opened in 2001, this cute lodge is bright and airy, with a glass-enclosed communal dining room decorated in European drawing-room style and both Japanese- and Western-style rooms, most with large windows providing great panoramic views (best are the corner rooms, and room nos. 208 and 210). Rooms without bathrooms do have sinks. Japanese meals, served in the dining room, feature local fish and other ingredients. Unfortunately, the hot-spring bath here is small.

Sounkyo Onsen, Kamikawacho, Kamikawa-gun 078-1701. ☎ 01658/5-3775. 21 units (6 with bathroom). ¥6,500 (\$54) per person without bathroom, ¥7,800 (\$65) per person with bathroom, including 2 meals. No credit cards. A 2-min. walk from the bus terminal. **Amenities:** Small indoor hot-spring bath; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

②76 **Resort Pension Yama-no-ue** This pension offers simple tatami rooms with just the basics. There are communal toilets, sinks, and showers; but for a real hot-spring bath, guests staying here are entitled to use the Spa Kurodake (see above) in the adjoining building for free. In summer, the small dining room

Tips A Note on Japanese Symbols

Many establishments and attractions in Japan do not have signs in Roman (English-language) letters. Those that don't are indicated in this guide with an oval with a number that corresponds to a number in the appendix showing the Japanese symbols. Thus, to find the Japanese symbol for, say, **Resort Pension Yama-no-ue** (above), refer to no. 276 in appendix C.

serves ample meals of Hokkaido cuisine. If you stay more than 1 night or in winter, you'll dine at Beergrill Canyon (see "Where to Dine," below). Breakfast is Western style.

Sounkyo Onsen, Kamikawacho, Kamikawa-gun 078-1701. ☎ **01658/5-3206**. Fax 01658/5-3207. 14 units (none with bathroom, 1 with toilet). ¥5,500 (\$46) per person. Breakfast ¥1,000 (\$8.35) extra; dinner ¥2,000 (\$17) extra. No credit cards. A 2-min. walk from the bus terminal. *In room*: TV, hot-water pot with tea, no phone.

WHERE TO DINE

Beergrill Canyon PIZZA/PASTA Located in the same building as Spa Kurodake (identified as "Community Center" on the English-language map), this casual restaurant serves various pizzas and pastas from its Japanese menu. Choices include pizza with mushrooms and bacon, spaghetti in a white-cream sauce with egg and bacon, spicy curry chicken, and sirloin steak (local beef). For a complete meal, add a mini-salad, bread, or rice to your entree by paying ¥200 (\$1.65) extra. Wash it all down with Kamikawa-brewed Hokuto beer.

Sounkyo. ☎ **01658/5-3361**. Main dishes ¥850–¥2,000 (\$7.10–\$17). No credit cards. Daily 11:30am–3:30pm and 5:30–9:30pm. Closed Wed in winter.

6 Akanko Spa & Akan National Park

Spreading through the eastern end of Hokkaido, **Akan National Park** 🌋🌳 features volcanic mountains, dense forests of subarctic primeval trees, and three caldera lakes, including Lake Akan.

The best place to stay in the park is **Akanko Onsen**, a small hot-spring resort on the edge of Lake Akan and home to 2,500 residents. It makes a good base for active vacations ranging from fishing to hiking and from which to explore both Akan National Park and nearby Kushiro Marshland National Park, famous for its red-crested cranes. It also has a re-created Ainu village, with one of the best music and dance performances I've seen.

ESSENTIALS

GETTING THERE By JR Train & Bus Since there's no train station at Akanko Onsen itself, transportation to the resort town is by train to Kushiro or Kitami and then by bus to Akanko. Kushiro is about 4 hours from Sapporo by JR train; Kitami is 4½ hours away. From **JR Kushiro Station**, buses depart four or five times a day for Akanko; the 2-hour trip costs ¥2,650 (\$22) one-way. From **Kitami**, buses depart twice a day (at last check at 9:30am and 3pm), and the 70-minute trip costs ¥1,800 (\$15). You must make a reservation for this bus by calling ☎ **0157/23-2181** in Kitami or ☎ **0154/67-2205** in Akanko.

If you're coming from Sounkyo Onsen, two buses a day connect Sounkyo Onsen with Akanko Onsen, with the one-way fare costing ¥3,260 (\$27) for the 3½-hour trip. (Reservations are required; call ☎ **01658/5-3321** in Sounkyo or ☎ **0154/67-2205** in Akan, or drop by the bus terminal in either town.)

All bus fares are half price for children.

In addition to regular buses, there are also sightseeing buses that take in the most important sights in both Akan and Kushiro Marshland national parks along the way. This is the best way to see the national park if you don't have your own car; for details, read "Seeing the Sights," below.

By Plane Because Akan National Park lies at the eastern extremity of Hokkaido, you may wish to fly at least one-way between here and Tokyo. The closest airport to Akanko Onsen is Kushiro Airport, with the flight from Tokyo

taking about 1½ hours and costing ¥35,000 (\$292) one-way in peak season on ANA and JAS. From Kushiro Airport, buses travel to Akanko in about 1 hour and 20 minutes for ¥2,090 (\$17).

VISITOR INFORMATION Akanko Onsen's Tourist Association (☎ 0154/67-2254; fax 0154/67-3024; open daily 9am–6pm) is located just a minute's walk from the Akanko Onsen bus terminal in the direction of the lake. (Turn right out of the bus terminal and take the 1st left; it will soon be on your right, just past the police box.) Occasionally, there's an English-speaker here, and in any case, you can pick up a pamphlet in English about Akan National Park with a map of the town and two foldouts on hiking. The staff will also make reservations for hotels and ryokan. For information on the park and its natural wonders, drop by the newly opened **Akankohan Eco Museum Center** (☎ 0154/67-2785; open 9am–5pm, to 7pm late June to Aug; located beside the lake, about a 7-minute walk from the bus terminal), which has free admission.

ORIENTATION & GETTING AROUND Akanko Onsen is small, and walking is the best way to get around. It consists primarily of one main street that snakes along the lake, with ryokan and souvenir shops lining both sides.

WHAT TO SEE & DO

SEEING THE SIGHTS

SIGHTSEEING BUS TOURS OF AKAN NATIONAL PARK If you're not renting a car, the best way to see Akan National Park is aboard a sightseeing bus departing from **Bihoro**, which is north of the park and can be reached by JR train from other parts of Hokkaido. That way, you'll travel all the way through the park and see the most important natural wonders en route, ending up at Akanko Onsen.

The bus trip takes 5 hours, making stops at several scenic spots along the way, including **Bihoro Pass** (a scenic overlook) and Kussharo and Mashu lakes. **Kussharo** is one of Japan's largest mountain lakes, but what makes it particularly interesting is its hot-spring waters right on the beach; in summer, you can see people digging holes to sit in the hot springs. **Mashu**, a crater lake that is considered one of Japan's most beautiful lakes, was called "lake of the devil" by the Ainu because no water flows either into it or out of it. Surely Mashu is one of Japan's least-spoiled lakes: Because of the steep, 198m (660-ft.) high rock walls ringing it, the lake has remained inaccessible to humans (the bus stops at an observation platform high above the water). The bus also stops at the foot of Mount Iou, with its sulfurous caldrons. **Beware:** Frequent fog often eliminates scenic views, there are tacky souvenir shops at every stop, and tours are in Japanese.

The bus trip, called the **Panorama Course**, costs ¥5,600 (\$47) for adults, half price for children. Buses depart from Bihoro twice daily, once in winter. Be sure to check departures ahead of time, since bus schedules change. For more information, call the **Bihoro bus center** at ☎ 01527/3-4181 (Japanese only) or fax the tourist information center in Akan (fax 0154/67-3024).

RED-CRESTED CRANES & BUS TOURS OF KUSHIRO MARSHLAND NATIONAL PARK Red-crested cranes, the official birds of Hokkaido, are traditionally regarded as both a good omen and a national symbol of Japan. Once threatened with extinction, these graceful and beautiful creatures now lead protected lives in and around **Kushiro Marshland National Park (Kushiro Shitsugen)**, Japan's largest marshland and designated the country's newest park in 1987. If you don't have a car, the best way to see the marshlands and catch a

glimpse of the cranes in their natural habitat is via sightseeing bus. Tours are conducted only in Japanese but traverse the marshland and make stops at observatories and Tancho-Tsuru Koen (see below). The **Akan Bus Company** (☎ 0154/37-2221) offers tours that begin and end at Kushiro Station twice a day from the end of April to October; the tours cost ¥2,650 (\$22) for adults and ¥1,330 (\$11) for children. The **Kushiro Bus Company** (☎ 0154/36-8181) offers a similar tour (departing Kushiro Station June–Oct) that includes lunch, at ¥5,500 (\$46) for adults and ¥3,780 (\$32) for children, with slightly cheaper rates if you join the tour at Kushiro Airport.

During the rest of the year, or if you prefer sightseeing on your own, the best place to learn about cranes is at the excellent **Akan Kokusai Tsuru Center (Akan International Crane Center)** (☎, 23–40 Akan (☎ 0154/66-4011; open daily 9am–5pm, closed Mon Apr–Oct). In addition to a film showing their beautiful courtship dance and nesting habits, it has fun, interactive displays with lots of explanations in English. You'll learn just about everything you'd ever want to know about red-crested cranes here, from why they fly to how much an egg weighs. Best of all, however, is adjacent **Tancho-no-Sato**, an excellent observatory on private land where 200 red-crested cranes live, court, and mate November through March. This is a great place to photograph the birds in action, and you'll be surprised at how large they actually are. Admission to both the International Crane Center and Tancho-no-Sato is ¥400 (\$3.35) for adults, ¥200 (\$1.65) for children. Plan on staying at least an hour in winter, less in summer when the birds have returned to their native marshlands. The International Crane Center is some 40 minutes from Akanko Onsen by bus; get off at the Tanchozuru stop (fare: ¥1,570/\$13). Incidentally, the bus that stops here is the same one that goes from Akanko Onsen to Kushiro Airport, so it's possible to stop here, visit, and then catch the next bus to Kushiro.

In summer, your best bet for observing cranes outside the marshland is **Tancho-Tsuru Koen (Red-crested Crane Reserve)**, Kushiro-cho (☎ 0154/56-2219; open daily 9am–6pm, to 4pm in winter), a marshy area set aside in 1958 for breeding and raising cranes. It now has 24 cranes, some of them second and third generation, living in natural habitats behind high mesh fences. Admission is ¥310 (\$2.60) for adults and ¥100 (85¢) for children. Also on the way to the airport but farther from Akanko, it's located 1¼ hours by bus from the Akanko Onsen bus terminal; get off at the Tsuru-koen stop. If all you want is a quick look, note that some buses en route to the airport make a 15-minute stop at this park, which is enough time to see some of the birds before you continue on.

ATTRACTIONS IN AKANKO ONSEN Although the Ainu originally lived near Kushiro, not Akan, they have built the **Ainu Kotan Village** in Akanko Onsen (☎ 0154/67-2727). Although the Ainu Kotan Village itself is just a souvenir shop-lined street, it leads to a thatched-roof lodge where you can see Ainu performing traditional dances and playing bamboo mouth harps. This is the most professional Ainu production I've seen, and since the dances aren't the same as those performed at Poroto Kotan in Shiraoi (see "Noboribetsu Spa & Shikotsu-Toya National Park," earlier in this chapter), these are highly recommended even if you've already been to Poroto Kotan. Thirty-minute shows are performed six times a day in summer (including evenings), less frequently in winter. Admission is ¥1,000 (\$8.35) for adults and ¥500 (\$4.15) for children. Alongside the performance lodge is the **Seikatsu Kinen Kan** (open May–Oct, daily 10am–10pm), an Ainu home and outbuildings with displays of various

Ainu utensils and crafts. Admission here is ¥300 (\$2.50) for adults and ¥100 (85¢) for children (skip it if you've been to Poroto Kotan).

ENJOYING THE OUTDOORS

BOATING For Japanese visitors, one of the most popular activities in Akanko Onsen is a **boat cruise of Lake Akan**, which provides a close-up view of the mountains, islands, and shoreline, all stunningly beautiful. Lake Akan is famous for its very rare spherical green algae, a spongelike ball of duckweed called **marimo** that's been designated a Special Natural Monument. Found in only a few places in the world, marimo is formed when many separate and stringy pieces of algae at the bottom of the 43m (144-ft.) deep lake roll around and eventually come together to form a ball, gradually growing larger and larger. It takes 150 to 200 years for marimo to grow to the size of a baseball; some in Lake Akan are as much as 29 centimeters (11½ in.) in diameter—meaning they are very old indeed. Supposedly, when the sun shines, the marimo rise to the surface of the water, giving Lake Akan a wonderful green shimmer. On your boat cruise you'll make a 15-minute stop at Churui Islet to see the **Marimo Exhibition Center** with a few tanks of marimo, but my favorite part of the tour is when the boat travels through narrow passages between islands and into hamlets. Cruises, with explanations in English, operate from May to mid-November and last 1 hour and 25 minutes, costing ¥1,620 (\$15) for adults and ¥850 (\$7.10) for children, including the exhibition center. Boats depart every 30 minutes (every hour May and Nov), with the last boat departing at 5:30pm in summer.

CANOEING To get a real feel for Akan Lake at duck and goose level, take a canoe trip in a two-person Canadian canoe, available May to October. For beginners, a 45-minute trip costs ¥2,000 (\$17) for adults and ¥1,400 (\$12) for children. There's also a 90-minute Adventure Course for ¥5,000 (\$42) for adults and ¥3,500 (\$29) for children that goes farther afield, while the 2½-hour Yaitai Island Course includes a trip to uninhabited Yaitai Island in the lake. You may see carp spawning, deer, or—if you are really lucky—bear. Make canoe reservations 1 day in advance at the **Akan Nature Center** (☎ 0154/67-2081).

FISHING ★★ Lake Akan is one of Japan's most famous fishing lakes. In addition to kokanee salmon, said to have originated in the lake, sport fish include rainbow trout, steelhead trout, and white spotted char, a native fish. If you want to fish, contact **Fishing Land** (☎ 0154/67-2057) at least 1 day in advance. A fishing permit costs ¥1,100 (\$9.15) per day; for ¥3,000 (\$25) more you can have a boat and a guide. Or contact the **Emerald Hotel** (☎ 0154/67-2011), which has two fly-fishing advisors who will take you to an island, set you up, and then come back to get you for ¥3,000 (\$25). Fly-fishing season is from May to the end of November, except from mid-July to mid-August when it's too hot. Fishing equipment is for sale in the Emerald Hotel's shop. If you do not catch and release, ask your hotel if they can cook your fish for you.

In winter, you can also go ice-fishing during the February Winter Festival; for ¥1,500 (\$13), festival staff will dig a hole in the ice for you and supply you with fishing equipment.

HIKING Akanko Onsen's easiest walk begins and ends right in town. Start at the **Akankohan Eco Museum Center** at the east end of town, where you'll find an easy, 30-minute footpath leading through a primeval forest of pines and ferns, past *bokke* (volcanic, bubbling mud), and along the lakeshore. It ends at the boat dock with cruises of Lake Akan (see above).

For more serious hiking, while out on your boat trip you'll see two cone-shaped volcanoes: **Oakandake (Mount Oakan)** to the east and **Meakandake (Mount Meakan)** to the south. Both are popular day-long destinations for hikers. **Mount Oakan** (called "male mountain" by the Ainu for its supposed manly features) is dormant, and the summit is about a 4½-hour hike from Akanko Onsen. You can reach the trail entrance, Takiguchi, in 5 minutes by bus (going in the direction of Kushiro, get off at the Takiguchi stop). **Mount Meakan** (which the Ainu called "female mountain"), the highest mountain in the Akan area, is active (so check before you go) and is covered with primeval forests of spruce and fir. There are three hiking trails up Mount Meakan. The trail access closest to Akanko is located at the west end of town, where you can follow the Furebetsu Woodland Road, a former transport road, to an old sulfur mine for 3 hours to get to the trail entrance (or take a bus for 35 min. to the Onneto stop). From the trail entrance, it's another 3 hours to the peak, from which you'll have panoramic views of the surrounding area. Pick up English-language alpine guides to Mount Oakan and Mount Meakan at the tourist association.

A shorter hike follows a trail to **Mount Hakuto-zan**, from which you also have a good view of the town and lake. It takes about 20 minutes to reach Akan's skiing area and another 50 minutes to reach Mount Hakuto-zan observatory, a grassy and moss-covered knobby hill that remains slightly warm throughout the year because of thermal activity just below the surface. The woods of birch and pine here are beautiful, and what's more, you'll probably find yourself all alone. Stop at the local tourist office for directions to the trail head and a map in Japanese.

WINTER ACTIVITIES In winter, Lake Akan freezes over and becomes a playground for winter sports. International marathon ice-skating races—200km (124 miles)—held in February have brought attention to the area's natural riches. **Cross-country skiing** (rental equipment ¥1,000/\$8.35 for 2 hr.), **ice-skating** (¥1,000/\$8.35 an hr.), and **ice fishing** (¥1,500/\$13 a day) are popular sports. For downhill skiers, the **Kokusetsu Akan-kohan ski ground** (☎ 0154/67-2881) is blessed with a magnificent view of Mount Oakan rising behind Lake Akan. The F.I.S.-certified slalom course attracts ski teams and individuals in training, while the intermediate and beginner slopes are popular with less demanding skiers. A day pass for lifts costs ¥3,000 (\$25); ski-rental equipment costs ¥5,000 (\$42).

In February, illuminated ice sculptures, traditional dance, nightly fireworks over the frozen lake, and stalls selling food make for a fun midwinter festival. Contact the tourist office for more details.

WHERE TO STAY

EXPENSIVE

②77 **Yuku-no-Sato Tsuruga** ★★ ★ *Finds* Extravagance is the word that comes to mind when describing Yuku-no-Sato Tsuruga, which translates loosely as "Village of eternally playing graceful cranes." Unsurprisingly, cranes are the main motif throughout, but what makes this hotel a standout are its hot-spring baths, among the most beautiful and fantasy provoking I've ever seen. One is designed as a village, spread on several levels and including a cavelike room and an outdoor bath beautifully landscaped with stones and pines overlooking the lake. The other, on the eighth floor, has the usual whirlpool, hot and dry saunas, and baths, as well as a rooftop hot-spring bath with 360-degree panoramic views. The baths, separated for men and women, are switched alternative days so guests may enjoy both. The rest of the hotel, with natural woods throughout,

well-designed restaurants (the hotel's massive main dining hall is divided into four buffet stations serving Italian, Japanese, Chinese, and Hawaiian food), and well-appointed guest rooms, do not disappoint. Most rooms are Japanese style, the best of which have lakeside views, large bathrooms, bar areas for entertaining, and seating around an indoor hearth. There are also more than 50 combination rooms with tatami area and beds, as well as five twin rooms that have great views of the lake from their own verandas.

4-6-10 Akanko Onsen, Akancho, Akan-gun 085-0467. ☎ 0154/67-2531. Fax 0154/67-2754. www.tsuruga.com. 129 units. Summer ¥18,500-¥32,000 (\$154-\$267) per person; off season ¥12,500-¥24,000 (\$104-\$200) per person. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. A 10-min. walk from the bus terminal; turn left out of the terminal, take the 1st right to the main street, and turn left. There are also free shuttle buses operating from Kushiro and Kitami stations (reservations required). **Amenities:** 2 restaurants (Japanese and international); coffee shop; 2 bars; lounge; beautiful indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; game room; shopping arcade; in-room massage. *In room:* A/C, TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, hair dryer, washlet toilet.

MODERATE

Akan View Hotel Despite its name, this 20-year-old hotel is one of the few around with no lake view. Most of its rooms are Western-style twins, narrow and with tiny bathrooms but with everything else you need; 30 Japanese-style rooms are also available. One of the best things about this hotel are the large indoor thermal pools (you wear your bathing suit here), one for swimming laps and another with slides for children, as well as the usual hot-spring baths (open 24 hr. except during cleaning) with a large, outdoor bathing area. I also like the glass-enclosed barbecue restaurant, open all year, where you can order Genghis Khan (lamb and vegetables), seafood, or beef meals you grill yourself (make reservations to dine here a day in advance). Otherwise, you dine buffet style in the communal dining room.

4-1-7 Akanko Onsen, Akancho, Akan-gun 085-0467. ☎ 0154/67-3131. Fax 0154/67-3139. 188 units. Summer ¥8,000-¥12,000 (\$67-\$100) per person; winter ¥6,000-¥10,000 (\$50-\$83) per person. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. A 7-min. walk from the bus terminal. Turn left out of the bus terminal, cross the bridge, and turn right at the stoplight. **Amenities:** Bar; lobby lounge; indoor swimming pool (free for hotel guests); tennis courts; indoor/outdoor hot-spring baths; rental bikes (¥500/\$4.15 per hr.); game room; in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

②78 **Hotel Emerald** ★ This lakefront ryokan is one of Akanko Onsen's most well-known and longest-standing accommodations. In the lobby is a tour desk that can arrange fishing, canoeing, skiing, and other adventure trips. Rooms are spread throughout three connected buildings; the cheapest rooms are in the oldest part. Note, however, that none of the Western-style rooms face the lake. (A mystery is the large corner room with mirrored ceiling above . . . twin beds; really, what's the point?) Best and most expensive are Japanese-style rooms facing the lake; meals served in your room cost ¥3,000 (\$25) extra. There's also a so-called Ladies Floor, where all the staff are women, and bathrooms and amenities are geared toward women. Regrettably, the hotel attracts tour groups, but pluses are the elaborate buffet breakfasts and dinners in a large dining room overlooking the lake, and a location just a minute's walk from Ainu Kotan Village (join the many Japanese who stroll over to a nighttime performance wearing yukata).

4-6-5 Akan Onsen, Akancho, Akan-gun 085-0467. ☎ 0154/67-2011. Fax 0154/67-2864. 206 units. ¥10,000-¥23,000 (\$90-\$207) per person. Winter discounts available. Rates include 2 meals. AE, DC, MC, V. A 9-min. walk from the bus terminal; turn left out of the terminal, take the 1st right to the main street, and turn left. **Amenities:** Buffet restaurant; karaoke bar; outdoor/indoor hot-spring baths; sauna; game room; tour desk; souvenir shop (which also sells fishing gear); in-room massage; coin-op washers and dryers. *In room:* TV, minibar, hot-water pot with tea, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

(279) Onsen Minshuku Kiri Located above a souvenir shop on the main street, these simple accommodations include clean Japanese-style rooms and a small cypress hot-spring bath.

4–3–26 Akanko Onsen, Akancho, Akan-gun 085-0467. ☎ **0154/67-2755**. Fax 0154/67-2755. 9 units (none with bathroom). ¥5,500 (\$46) per person including 2 meals; ¥3,500 (\$29) per person without meals. MC, V. A 9-min. walk from the bus terminal; turn left out of the terminal, take the 1st right to the main street, and turn left (it's across from Hotel Emerald). **Amenities:** Indoor hot-spring bath; coin-op washer and dryer. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea.

(280) Tohoukan Ryokan This modest ryokan, with Japanese-style rooms, is located a bit inland so there are no views from the windows, but they do open. The owner is both the head of the Marimo Protection Association and a slalom ski coach, so he is ideally suited to answer questions on those topics. Hot-spring baths are open 24 hours a day, and Japanese food is served in a communal dining room. Western breakfasts, as well as vegetarian meals, are available if you order them when you make your reservation.

2–3–3 Akanko Onsen, Akancho, Akan-gun 085-0467. ☎ **0154/67-2050**. Fax 0154/67-2945. 25 units (2 with bathroom). ¥6,450 (\$54) per person including 2 meals and tax; ¥3,500 (\$29) per person without meals. MC, V. A 2-min. walk from the bus terminal; turn left out of the terminal and take the 1st right (it will be on the left). **Amenities:** Hot-spring bath; free use of washer and dryer. *In room:* TV, hot-water pot with tea.

WHERE TO DINE

Porono AINU For a different kind of lunch, head to the Ainu Kotan Village and look on the right-hand side for a souvenir shop called Mingei Kissa with a sign reading HANDMADE FOLK CRAFT AND AINU TRADITIONAL FOOD. In the back you'll find two tables, a counter, and funky ethnic decor. The menu lists *rataskepu*, a cold vegetable dish with beans, corn, and pumpkin; *pochimo*, a fried potato cake (a bit hard); pumpkin cakes; and drinks like bark tea (*shikerebe*). Or order the Ainu teishoku set meal (rice with red beans and deer soup last time I was there). It's definitely not your usual meal: I did not love the food, but I found it interesting to eat food gleaned from the natural surroundings.

Ainu Kotan Village, Akanko Onsen. ☎ **0154/67-2159**. Dishes ¥350 – ¥450 (\$2.90–\$3.75); Ainu teishoku ¥800 (\$6.65). No credit cards. Daily noon–9pm.

Appendix A:

Japan in Depth

With a population of about 127 million, a history stretching back thousands of years, the world's longest-reigning monarchy, and unique forms of culture, art, food, etiquette, and religion, Japan merits more than this short chapter can deliver. Be sure to check "Recommended Books," in chapter 2, for other sources of information.

1 History 101

ANCIENT HISTORY (ca. 30,000 B.C.–A.D. 710) According to mythology, Japan's history began when the sun goddess, Amaterasu, sent one of her descendants down to the island of Kyushu to unify the people of Japan. Unification, however, was not realized until a few generations later when Jimmu, the great-grandson of the goddess's emissary, succeeded in bringing all of the country under his rule. Because of his divine descent, Jimmu became emperor in 660 B.C. (the date is mythical), thus establishing the line from which all of Japan's emperors are said to derive. However mysterious the origin of this imperial dynasty, it is acknowledged as the longest-reigning such family in the world.

Legend begins to give way to fact only in the 4th century A.D., when a family by the name of Yamato succeeded in expanding its kingdom throughout much of the country. At the core of the unification achieved by the Yamato family was the Shinto religion. Indigenous to Japan, **Shintoism** is marked by the worship of natural things—mountains, trees, the moon, stars, rivers, seas, fire, animals, rocks, even vegetables—as the embodiment of gods (called *kami*) and of the spirits of ancestors. It is also marked by belief in the emperor's divinity. Along with Buddhism (see below), Shintoism is still a driving belief in Japanese life.

Although the exact origin of the Japanese people is unknown, we know Japan was once connected to the Asian mainland by a land bridge, and the territory of Japan was occupied as early as 30,000 B.C. From about 10,000 B.C. to 300 B.C., hunter-gatherers, called Jomon, thrived in small communities primarily in central Honshu; they're best known for their hand-formed pottery decorated with cord patterns. The Jomon Period was followed by the Yayoi Period, which was marked by metalworking, the pottery wheel, and the mastering of irrigated rice cultivation. The Yayoi Period lasted until about A.D. 300, after which the Yamato family unified the state for the first time and set up their court in what is now Nara Prefecture. Yamato (present-day Japan) began turning cultural feelers toward its great neighbor to the west, China.

In the 6th century A.D., **Buddhism**, which originated in India 1,200 years earlier, was brought to Japan via China and Korea, and the large-scale Chinese cultural and scholarly influence—including art, architecture, and the use of Chinese written characters—began. In 604, the prince regent Shotoku, greatly influenced by the teachings of Buddhism and Confucianism and still a beloved figure today, drafted a document calling for political reforms and a constitutional government. By 607 he was sending multitudes of Japanese scholars to

China to study Buddhism, and he started building Buddhist temples. The most famous is **Horyuji Temple** near Nara, said to be the oldest existing wooden structure in the world. He also built **Shitennoji Temple** in what is now Osaka.

THE NARA PERIOD (710–784) Before the 700s, the site of Japan's capital changed every time a new emperor came to the throne. In 710, however, a permanent capital was established at Nara. Although it remained the capital for only 74 years, seven successive emperors ruled from Nara. The period was graced with the expansion of Buddhism and flourishing temple construction throughout the country. Buddhism also inspired the arts, including Buddhist sculpture, metal casting, painting, and lacquerware. It was during this time that Emperor Shomu, the most devout Buddhist among the Nara emperors, ordered the casting of a huge bronze statue of Buddha to be erected in Nara. Known as the Daibutsu, it remains Nara's biggest attraction.

THE HEIAN PERIOD (794–1192) In 794, the capital was moved to Heiankyo (present-day Kyoto), and following the example of cities in China, Kyoto was laid out in a grid pattern with broad roads and canals. Heiankyo means "capital of peace and tranquillity," and the Heian Period was a glorious time for aristocratic families, a time of luxury and prosperity during which court life reached new artistic heights. Moon viewing became popular. Chinese characters were blended with a new Japanese writing system, allowing for the first time the flowering of Japanese literature and poetry. The life of the times was captured in the works of two women: Sei Shonagon, who wrote a collection of impressions of her life at court known as the *Pillow Book*; and Murasaki Shikibu, who wrote the world's first major novel, *The Tale of Genji*.

Because the nobles were completely engrossed in their luxurious lifestyles, however, they failed to notice the growth of military clans in the provinces. The two most powerful warrior clans were the Taira (also called Heike) and the Minamoto (also called Genji), whose fierce civil wars tore the nation apart until a young warrior, Minamoto Yoritomo, established supremacy. (In Japan, a person's family name—here, Minamoto—comes first, followed by the given name; I have followed this order throughout this book.)

THE KAMAKURA PERIOD (1192–1333) Wishing to set up rule far away from Kyoto, Minamoto Yoritomo established his capital in a remote and easily defended fishing village called Kamakura, not far from today's Tokyo. In becoming the nation's first *shogun*, or military dictator, Yoritomo laid the groundwork for 700 years of military governments—in which the power of the country passed from the aristocratic court into the hands of the warrior class—until the imperial court was restored in 1868.

The Kamakura Period is perhaps best known for the unrivaled ascendancy of the warrior caste, or **samurai**. Ruled by a rigid honor code, samurai were bound in loyalty to their feudal lord, and they became the only caste allowed to carry two swords. They were supposed to give up their lives for their lord without hesitation, and if they failed in their duty, they could regain their honor only by committing ritualistic suicide, or *seppuku*. Spurning the sort of life led by court nobles, samurai embraced a spartan lifestyle. When **Zen Buddhism**, with its tenets of mental and physical discipline, was introduced into Japan from China in the 1190s, it appealed greatly to the samurai. Weapons and armor achieved new heights in artistry, while *Bushido*, the way of the warrior, contributed to the spirit of national unity.

Here and Zazen: Buddhism in Japan

Founded in India in the 6th century B.C., Buddhism came to Japan in the 6th century A.D. via China and Korea, bringing with it the concept of eternal life. By the end of the 6th century, Buddhism had gained such popularity that the prince regent Shotoku, one of Japan's most remarkable historical figures, declared Buddhism the state religion and based many of his governmental policies on its tenets. Another important Buddhist leader to emerge was a priest called Kukai, known posthumously as Kobo Daishi. After studying Buddhism in China in the early 800s, he returned and built temples throughout Japan, including the famous 88 temples on Shikoku Island and those on Mount Koya, which continue to attract millions of pilgrims today.

Probably the Buddhist sect best known to the West is Zen Buddhism. Considered the most Japanese form of Buddhism, Zen is the practice of meditation and a strictly disciplined lifestyle to rid oneself of desire so that one can achieve enlightenment. There are no rites in Zen Buddhism, no dogmas, no theological conceptions of divinity; you do not analyze rationally but are supposed to know things intuitively. The strict and simple lifestyle of Zen appealed greatly to Japan's samurai warrior class, and many of Japan's arts, including the tea ceremony, arose from the practice of Zen.

Zazen, or meditation, is practiced as a form of mental or spiritual training; laypeople meditate to relieve stress and clear their minds. You achieve Zazen in a cross-legged lotus position with your neck and back straight and your eyes slightly open. Usually done in a group—in a semi-dark room with cushions, facing the wall—meditation is helped along by a monk, who stalks noiselessly behind the meditators. If someone squirms or moves, the offender is whacked on the shoulders with a stick to help him or her get back to meditating. There are several Zen temples where foreigners can join in Zazen (see chapter 4); if you'd like to try it, contact the Tourist Information Center in Tokyo or Kyoto, or check the *Japan Times* to see whether a session of Zazen is being organized with instruction in English.

In 1274, Mongolian forces under Kublai Khan made an unsuccessful attempt to invade Japan. They returned in 1281 with a larger fleet, but a typhoon destroyed it. Regarding the cyclone as a gift from the gods, the Japanese called it *kamikaze*, meaning “divine wind,” which took on a different significance at the end of World War II when Japanese pilots flew suicide missions in an attempt to turn the tide of war.

THE MUROMACHI & AZUCHI-MOMOYAMA PERIODS (1336–1603)

After the fall of the Kamakura shogunate, a new feudal government was set up at Muromachi in Kyoto. The next 200 years, however, were marred by bloody civil wars as *daimyo* (feudal lords) staked out their fiefdoms. Similar to the barons of Europe, the daimyo owned tracts of land and had complete rule over the people who lived on them. Each lord had his retainers, the samurai, who

fought his enemies. This period of civil wars is called Sengoku-Jidai, or **Age of the Warring States**.

Yet these centuries of strife also saw a blossoming of art and culture. Kyoto witnessed the construction of the extravagant Golden and Silver pavilions as well as the artistic arrangement of Ryoanji Temple's famous rock garden. Noh drama, the tea ceremony, flower arranging, and landscape gardening became the passions of the upper class. At the end of the 16th century, a number of castles were built on mountaintops to demonstrate the daimyos' strength, guard their fiefdoms, and defend themselves against the firearms introduced by the Portuguese.

In the second half of the 16th century, a brilliant military strategist by the name of Oda Nobunaga almost succeeded in ending the civil wars. Upon Nobunaga's assassination (by one of his own retainers), one of his best generals, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, took up the campaign, built magnificent Osaka Castle, and crushed rebellion to unify Japan. Nobunaga and Hideyoshi's successive rules are known as the **Azuchi-Momoyama Period**, after the names of their castles.

THE EDO PERIOD (1603–1867) Upon Hideyoshi's death (1598), power was seized by Tokugawa Ieyasu, a statesman so shrewd and skillful in eliminating enemies that his heirs would continue to rule Japan for the next 250 years. After defeating his greatest rival in the famous battle of Sekigahara, Tokugawa set up a shogunate government in 1603 in Edo (present-day Tokyo), leaving the emperor intact but virtually powerless in Kyoto. In 1615, he assured his supremacy by getting rid of Hideyoshi's descendants in a fierce battle at Osaka Castle that destroyed the castle and annihilated the Toyotomi clan.

Meanwhile, European influence in Japan was spreading. The first contact with the Western world had occurred in 1543, when Portuguese merchants (with firearms) arrived, followed by Christian missionaries. St. Francis Xavier landed in Kyushu in 1549, remaining for 2 years and converting thousands of Japanese; by 1580, there were perhaps as many as 150,000 Japanese Christians. Although Japan's rulers at first welcomed foreigners and trade, they gradually became alarmed by the Christian missionary influence. Hearing of the Catholic church's power in Rome and fearing the expansionist policies of European nations, the shogunate banned Christianity in the early 1600s. In 1597, 26 Japanese and European Christians were crucified in Nagasaki.

The Tokugawa shogunate intensified the campaign against Christians in 1639 when it closed all ports to foreign trade. Adopting a policy of **total isolation**, the shogunate forbade foreigners from landing in Japan and Japanese from leaving; even those Japanese who had been living abroad in overseas trading posts were never allowed to return. The only exception was in Nagasaki, where a colony of tightly controlled Chinese merchants and a handful of Dutch were confined to a trading post on a tiny island.

Thus began an amazing 200-year period in Japanese history during which Japan was closed to the rest of the world. It was a time of political stability at the expense of personal freedom, as all aspects of life were strictly controlled by the Tokugawa government. Japanese society was divided into four distinct **classes**: samurai, farmers, craftspeople, and merchants. Class determined everything in daily life, from where a person lived to what he was allowed to wear. Samurai led the most exalted social position, and it was probably during the Tokugawa Period that the samurai class reached the zenith of its glory. At the bottom of the social ladder were the merchants, but peace and prosperity led to the

development of new entertainment forms to occupy their time: Kabuki drama and woodblock prints became the rage, while stoneware and porcelain, silk brocade for kimono, and lacquerware improved in quality. In fact, it was probably the shogunate's rigid policies that actually fostered the arts, since anything new was considered dangerous and quickly suppressed. The Japanese were forced to retreat inward, and they focused their energies in the arts, perfecting handicrafts down to the most minute detail whether it was swords, *inro* (small containers for medicine), kimono, or lacquered boxes. Only Japan's many festivals offered relief from harsh and restrictive social mores.

To ensure that no daimyo in the distant provinces would overrun the shogun's power, the Tokugawa government ordered each daimyo to leave his family in Edo as permanent residents (effectively as hostages) and required the lord to spend a prescribed number of months in Edo every other year. In expending so much time and money traveling back and forth and maintaining elaborate residences both in the provinces and in Edo, the daimyo had no resources left with which to wage a rebellion. This is also when inns and townships sprang up along Japan's major highways to accommodate the elaborate processions of palanquins, samurai, and footmen traveling back and forth between Edo and the provinces.

Even though the Tokugawa government took such measures to ensure its supremacy, by the mid-19th century it was clear that the feudal system was outdated and economic power was in the hands of the merchants. Many samurai families were impoverished, and discontent with the shogunate became widespread.

In 1853, American Commodore Matthew C. Perry sailed to Japan, seeking to gain trading rights. But the Japanese were unwilling, so Perry departed, his mission unaccomplished. Returning a year later, he forced the shogun to sign an agreement despite the disapproval of the emperor, thus ending Japan's 2 centuries of isolation. In 1867, powerful families toppled the Tokugawa regime and restored the emperor as ruler, thus bringing the Feudal Era to a close.

MODERN JAPAN (1868–PRESENT) In 1868, Emperor Meiji moved his imperial government from Kyoto to Edo, renamed it Tokyo (Eastern Capital), and designated it the official national capital. During the next few decades, known as the **Meiji Restoration**, Japan rapidly progressed from a feudal agricultural society of samurai and peasants to an industrial nation. The samurai were stripped of their power and no longer were allowed to carry swords, thus ending a privileged way of life begun almost 700 years earlier in Kamakura. A prime minister and a cabinet were appointed, a constitution was drafted, and a parliament (called the Diet) was elected. With the enthusiastic support of Emperor Meiji, the latest in Western technological know-how was imported, including railway and postal systems, along with specialists and advisers: Between 1881 and 1898, about 10,000 Westerners were retained by the Japanese government to help modernize the country.

Meanwhile, Japan made incursions into neighboring lands. In 1894 to 1895, it fought and won a war against China; in 1904 to 1905, it attacked and defeated Russia; and in 1910, it annexed Korea. After militarists gained control of the government in the 1930s, these expansionist policies continued; Manchuria was annexed, and Japan went to war with China again in 1937. On the other side of the world, as **World War II** flared in Europe, Japan formed a military (Axis) alliance with Germany and Italy and attacked French Indochina.

On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, entering World War II against the United States. Although Japan went on to conquer Hong Kong, Singapore, Burma, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, and Guam, the tide eventually turned, and American bombers reduced every major Japanese city to rubble with the exception of historic Kyoto. On August 6, 1945, the United States dropped the world's first atomic bomb over Hiroshima, followed on August 9 by a second over Nagasaki. Japan submitted to unconditional surrender on August 14, with Emperor Hirohito's radio broadcast telling his people the time had come for "enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable." American and other **Allied occupation** forces arrived and remained until 1952. For the first time in history, Japan had suffered defeat by a foreign power; the country had never before been invaded or occupied by a foreign nation.

The experience had a profound effect on the Japanese people, yet they emerged from their defeat and began to rebuild. In 1946, under the guidance of the Allied military authority headed by U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur, they adopted a democratic constitution renouncing war and the use of force to settle international disputes and divesting the emperor of divinity, giving power to the people instead. A parliamentary system of government was set up, and 1947 witnessed the first general elections for the National Diet, the government's legislative body. After its founding in 1955, the **Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)** remained the undisputed majority party for decades, giving Japan the kind of political stability it needed to grow economically and compete in world markets.

To the younger generation, the occupation was less a painful burden to be suffered than an opportunity to remake their country, with American encouragement, into a modern, peace-loving, and democratic state. A special relationship developed between the Japanese and their American occupiers. In the early 1950s, as the Cold War between the United States and the Communist world erupted in hostilities in Korea, that relationship grew into a firm alliance, strengthened by a security treaty. In 1952, the occupation ended, and Japan joined the United Nations as an independent country.

Avoiding involvement in foreign conflicts, the Japanese concentrated on economic recovery. Through a series of policies favoring domestic industries and shielding Japan from foreign competition, they achieved **rapid economic growth**. In 1964, Tokyo hosted the Summer Olympic Games, showing the world that the nation had transformed itself into a formidable industrialized power. Incomes doubled during the 1960s, and a 1967 government study found that 90% of the Japanese considered themselves middle class. By the 1980s, Japan was by far the richest industrialized nation in Asia and the envy of its neighbors, who strove to emulate Japan's success. Sony was a household word around the globe; books flooded the international market touting the economic secrets of Japan, Inc. After all, Japan seemed to have it all: a good economy, political stability, safe streets, and great schools. As the yen soared, Japanese traveled abroad as never before, and Japanese businessmen gained national attention as they gobbled up real estate in foreign lands and purchased works of art at unheard-of prices.

Meanwhile, a snowballing trade surplus had created friction between Japan and the United States, its chief trading partner. In the 1980s, as Japanese auto sales in the United States soared and foreign sales in Japan continued to be restricted, disagreements between Tokyo and Washington heated up. In 1989,

Emperor Hirohito died of cancer at age 87, bringing the 63-year Showa Era to an end and ushering in the **Heisei Period** under Akihito, the 125th emperor, who proclaimed the new “Era of Peace” (Heisei).

In the early 1990s, shadows of financial doubt began to spread over the land of the rising sun, with alarming reports of bad bank loans, inflated stock prices, and overextended corporate investment abroad. In 1992, **recession** hit Japan, with the Nikkei (the Japanese version of the American Dow) falling a gut-churning 63% from its 1989 peak, bursting the economic bubble and plunging the country into its worst recession since World War II. In 1993, the Japanese government, under intense international pressure to liberalize its trade policies, agreed to open its rice market to imports, a move that angered many nationalists (some went so far as to maintain that the Japanese couldn’t eat imported rice because their digestive systems were different). Japan also came under increasing fire from abroad for not taking a more active role in world affairs, consonant with its economic power. In 1992, bowing to international pressure, Japan agreed to take part in United Nations peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, sending a small contingent of troops (the first to serve outside Japan since World War II) and civilian police instructors. In doing so, the government went against strong public opposition.

Meanwhile, public confidence in the LDP, which had held power uninterrupted for nearly 4 decades, eroded after its top officials were accused of participating in a series of political and financial scandals. But a revolving door of prime ministers (many of whom also became implicated in scandals) throughout the 1990s failed to revive the economy or alleviate voters’ growing fears of financial doom. Indeed, in 1998 a record number of companies filed for bankruptcy; in 1999 unemployment hit a record high of 4.6%, its highest level since World War II.

But almost as frightening to most Japanese as a tightening of the economic belt was an increasing feeling of vulnerability and helplessness. The government had long assured its people that Japan’s buildings, railway lines, and highways were earthquake-proof—but the **earthquake** that jolted Kobe in 1995 was a combination vertical/horizontal shock, not the more common horizontal shock, and buildings, elevated highways, subway tunnels, and almost all of Kobe port’s container lifts collapsed. The massive earthquake, which measured 7.3 on the Richter scale, killed more than 6,000 people and left 300,000 homeless.

Crime also became a national concern, fueled by some gruesome events: Just 2 months after the Kobe quake, an obscure religious sect, Aum Shinrikyo, released the deadly nerve gas sarin on three different commuter lines during Tokyo’s rush hour, killing 12 people and injuring more than 5,000. In 1997, a teenager killed and beheaded an 11-year-old boy in Kobe, but the worst blow of all was in 2001, when a knife-wielding man stormed into an elementary school in Osaka Prefecture, fatally stabbing 8 children and wounding 15 others. For many Japanese, it seemed that the very core of their society had begun to crumble.

Even Japan–U.S. relations became strained, especially after the 1995 rape of a young teenage girl by U.S. servicemen stationed in Okinawa, followed by other alleged rapes in Okinawa in 2001 and 2003. In February 2001, a U.S. nuclear-powered submarine collided with a Japanese fishing-training vessel off Hawaii, sinking the fishing boat and killing nine Japanese.

In April 2001, after yet another prime minister resigned due to scandal, Koizumi Junichiro took the political helm. Although a member of the LPD, the long-haired, 59-year-old Koizumi had long been considered something of a

maverick, battling against the long-established power brokers of the LPD and vowing to overturn the LPD's long-standing pork-barrel politics by slashing public spending on bridges, dams, and roads; forcing Japanese banks to write off bad loans; and dismantling regulations that protected large sectors of the economy. His cries for **reform**, coupled by media attention that gave him the revered status of a rock star, won Koizumi more voter support than any prime minister since the bubble economy. Following the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S., Koizumi quickly showed allegiance by pushing through an anti-terrorism bill that enabled Japan's military to ship supplies and provide medical and other non-combative support in Afghanistan. In 2003, Japan pledged \$1.5 billion in foreign aid to American reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

But Japan's biggest international threat is considered to be its neighbor, North Korea, which lobbed its first missile over Japan in 1998 and declared in 2002 that it had never halted its nuclear-weapons program despite a 1994 nuclear accord. In response, Japan launched two spy satellites in 2003 to monitor North Korea's missile and suspected nuclear-weapons programs. Meanwhile, in 2002 North Korea admitted for the first time that it had abducted 13 young Japanese in the '70s and '80s to teach Japanese language and customs to North Korean spies. Five of the abductees (North Korea claims the other eight died of natural causes) were granted a 2-week visit to Japan, but when they subsequently announced their intent to remain in Japan permanently, North Korea refused to allow their children to join them.

2 Japan Today

Prime Minister Koizumi, who was re-elected to a 3-year term as head of the LPD in September 2003, has his work cut out for him. Not only must he restructure an uncooperative government, but he must also maintain support from a nation that has suffered a severe crisis of confidence for more than a decade. The **economy** is stagnant, growing at a rate of less than 1% a year compared to the 6% annual growth it enjoyed in the 1980s. In April 2003, the Nikkei plunged to a 20-year low.

Koizumi's reform efforts to downsize government and reduce spending, privatize government-affiliated entities, transfer tax revenue sources to local governments, and dispose of banks' bad loans have met with only limited success. Critics contend that the pace of his reforms has been too slow. Public support of Koizumi now stands at about 45%, down sharply from the 80% to 90% popularity he enjoyed in the initial months of his administration.

On a personal level, few Japanese remain untouched by the **recession**. Fallen assets have robbed individuals of life savings, and real estate prices have fallen as much as 70% from what they were in 1990. A record-breaking number of companies have gone bankrupt, and lifetime employment is no longer a guarantee. It's especially brutal for workers older than 45 who are seeking work (there is no law against age discrimination in Japan). Yet Japan, with one of the most frugal welfare-benefit plans in the industrialized world, is ill-equipped to handle the swelling ranks of the unemployed, which now hover at around 5.3%. Unemployment checks are paid out for only a limited time—sometimes only 10 weeks—and support for the poverty-stricken is granted only after the recipient has sold all assets, spent all savings, and submitted statements from family members stating they cannot or will not provide any support. Homelessness is so common that it no longer draws stares, even in the swank Ginza District.

But there are other, more troubling cracks in the societal fiber. According to recent surveys, most Japanese believe that **crime** is on the increase. Student attacks on teachers—some fatal—have dominated the news, and student bullying is common. Lurid murders, though rare, garner media attention. Even theft is a major topic, virtually unheard of during the bubble economy. My former landlady fears burglary so much that she refuses to open her doors to strangers. My friend's boyfriend's car was stolen from a parking lot, one of 119 luxury cars reported stolen in Tokyo in 2000. In 2001, the number of thefts reported nationwide—primarily purse-snatching, shoplifting, and robbery—jumped to 2.34 million, up from 814,648 a decade earlier.

All these crises—the recession, unemployment, scandals, crime, and natural and man-made disasters—have been a major blow to the national psyche. Japanese fear that their country is no longer safe, predictable, and orderly—something they had always taken for granted and prided themselves on. Although it's mainly the older generation that is bewildered by this new Japan, the older generation cannot be ignored: Japan has one of the **fastest-aging populations** in the world. About 17% of its population is 65 and older; by 2020, that number is expected to hit 25%. Meanwhile, the birth rate in Japan is at an all-time low of 1.38 per woman (the birth-control pill was legalized in 1999), prompting the Japanese Health and Welfare Ministry to announce that a predicted shortage of future workers will severely strain the country's resources for pensions and health care.

For the short-term visitor to Japan, the events that seem so overwhelming to the Japanese will make themselves readily apparent mainly in financial terms: The high yen against the dollar still makes the country seem expensive; on the other hand, **inflation** is so low (in fact, some call it deflation) that hotel rates have remained mostly stable, and many restaurants now offer meals at substantially lower prices than in the 1980s. The recession has also spawned 100-Yen shops with discounted goods. Japan *is* affordable if you live and eat much as the Japanese do.

As for safety, **earthquakes** are a fact of life in Japan, just as they are in California and just as other natural phenomena are elsewhere. Tokyo experiences about 50 quakes a year that you can actually feel, which means I've felt quite a few of them, mostly minor tremors. But the possibility of earthquakes doesn't keep me from going to Japan; see "Fast Facts: Japan," in chapter 2 for advice on what to do in the event of an earthquake.

As for personal **safety**, crime in Japan doesn't even begin to approach the criminal level of the United States. Most victims of violent crime are known to the attacker, with incidence so low that a murder makes national news. I am more careful than I was 15 years ago—I guard my purse in crowded subways, I avoid parks after dark—but for many from other big cities, such precautions seem merely self-evident.

For the most part, life in Japan appears much as it always has—humming with energy, crowded beyond belief in its major cities, and filled with acts of human kindness. Teenagers seem less bent on following in their parents' footsteps, dressing more casually and wildly, yet they still seem very well mannered and remain captivated by innocent fads that take on larger-than-life proportions in Japan, whether it's cellphones that double as cameras or portrait booths that will print your likeness on sheets of tiny stickers. Families spend more time together because companies are no longer willing to pay overtime. Japanese

Fun Fact The Magical World of Vending Machines

One of the things that usually surprises visitors to Japan is the number of vending machines in the country. They're virtually everywhere—in train stations, in front of shops, on the back streets of residential neighborhoods. Most will take bills and give back change. Many have almost nonsensical English promotional lines on them, like ENJOY REFRESHING TIME. Some will even talk to you.

And what can you buy in these vending machines? First, there are the obvious items—drinks and snacks, including hot or cold coffee in a can. But if you're on your way to someone's house, you might be able to pick up a bouquet of flowers from a machine. Your Walkman is out of batteries? You may be able to find those, too, along with CDs, film, and disposable cameras. Vending machines outside post offices sell stamps and postcards.

But there are also things sold from sidewalk vending machines that would meet with instant protest in other countries around the world. Cigarettes are sold on almost every corner, where even children can buy them if they want to. Until recently, beer was also readily available, though in an effort to curb alcoholism and underage drinking, access is now more limited.

I remember a vending machine in my Tokyo neighborhood. By day, it was blank, with no clue as to what was inside. Come night, however, the thing would light up, and on display would be pornographic comics.

If it's available in Japan, it's probably in a vending machine somewhere.

department stores are so crowded with shoppers and a dazzling array of goods that they seem to belie the recession (though Japanese are careful buyers). I'm astounded by the number of new tourist attractions that have opened throughout Japan in the past decade and the number of high-class hotels that have debuted in Tokyo the past couple years. Getting around the country has never been easier. There are more foreign tourists visiting Japan than ever before, mostly from neighboring Asian countries.

3 Minding Your Ps & Qs

As an island nation with few natural resources, Japan's 127 million people are its greatest asset. Hardworking, honest, and proud about performing every task well no matter how insignificant it may seem, the Japanese are well known for their politeness and helpfulness to strangers. Indeed, hardly anyone returns from a trip to Japan without stories of extraordinary kindnesses extended by the Japanese.

With almost 99% of its population consisting of ethnic Japanese, Japan is one of the most homogeneous nations in the world. That, coupled with Japan's actual physical isolation as an island nation, has more than anything else led to a feeling among the Japanese that they belong to a single huge tribe different

from any other people on earth—that all people can basically be divided into two categories: Japanese and non-Japanese. You'll often hear a Japanese preface a statement or opinion with the words “We Japanese,” implying that all Japanese think alike.

Indeed, one characteristic of the Japanese that has received much publicity—and is seen (at least by some) as a reason Japan became so economically powerful so quickly—is this **group mentality**. Whereas in the West the attainment of “happiness” is the elusive goal for a full and rewarding life, in Japan it's satisfactory performance of **duty**. From the time they are born, the Japanese are instilled with a sense of duty that extends toward parents, spouses, bosses, co-workers, neighbors, and society as a whole. In a nation as crowded as Japan, consideration of others is essential, and consideration of the group always wins out over the desire of the individual. In fact, I have had Japanese tell me they consider individuality synonymous with selfishness and a complete disregard for the feelings of others.

MEETING THE JAPANESE

On a personal level, the Japanese are among the most likable people in the world. They are kind, thoughtful, and adept in perceiving another person's needs. The Japanese have an unerring eye for pure beauty, whether it be in food, architecture, or landscaped gardens; it's impossible to visit Japan and not have some of the Japanese appreciation of beauty rub off.

If you're invited to Japan by an organization or business, you'll receive the royal treatment and will most likely be wined and dined so wonderfully and thoroughly that you'll never want to leave. If you go to Japan on your own as an ordinary tourist, however, chances are that your experiences will be much different. Except for those who have lived or traveled abroad, few Japanese have had much contact with foreigners. In fact, even in Tokyo there are Japanese who have never spoken to a foreigner and would be quite embarrassed and uncomfortable if they were confronted with the possibility. And even though most of them have studied English, few Japanese have had the opportunity to use the language and cannot (or are too shy to) communicate in it. So don't be surprised if you find the empty seat beside you on the subway the last one to be occupied—most Japanese are deathly afraid you'll ask them a question they won't understand.

In many respects, therefore, it's much harder to meet the locals in Japan than in many other countries. The Japanese are simply much more shy than Americans. Although they will sometimes approach you to ask whether they might practice English with you, for the most part you're left pretty much on your own unless you make the first move.

Probably the easiest way to meet Japanese is to go where they play—namely, the country's countless **bars**, including those that serve *yakitori* (skewered chicken). Usually small affairs, each with perhaps just a counter and some tables, they're often filled with both younger and older Japanese, many of whom are regulars. As the evening wears on, you'll encounter Japanese who will want to speak to you if they understand English, and slightly inebriated Japanese who will speak to you even if they don't. If you're open to them, such chance encounters may prove to be the highlight of your trip or, at the very least, an evening of just plain fun.

Janie, who traveled around Japan with her then-3-year-old daughter, found that **traveling with children** opened up opportunities like a magic key. Other

The Home-Visit System

Recognizing the difficulty foreigners may face in meeting the Japanese, the Japan National Tourist Organization has launched a super program called the **Home-Visit System**, which offers overseas visitors the chance to visit an English-speaking Japanese family in their home for a few hours. Not only does such an encounter bring you in direct contact with Japanese, it also offers a glimpse into their lifestyle. You can even request that a family member share your occupation, though such requests are, of course, sometimes impossible to fulfill. The program doesn't cost anything, and it's offered in 14 cities throughout the country. To take advantage of it, all you do is make a call or apply in person at least 24 hours in advance—preferably 2 days in advance—to the local administrative authority or private organization (which is sometimes the local tourist office) that handles the home visit in each of the participating 14 towns. After contacting a local family, the office will inform you of the family and the time to visit. Most visits take place for a few hours in the evening (dinner is not served). It's a good idea to bring a small gift such as flowers, fruit, or a souvenir of some kind from your hometown. Prior to your visit, you may be asked to appear in person at the application office to obtain detailed directions; or the office may call with the directions. Note that application offices may be closed on weekends and holidays. In addition, it's impossible to make reservations from abroad. You're allowed only one visit during your stay in Japan. Here are a few contact numbers for cities participating in the Home-Visit System: **Narita** (☎ 0476/34-6251 or 0476/24-3198), **Yokohama** (☎ 045/441-7300), **Nagoya** (☎ 052/581-5689), **Kyoto** (☎ 075/752-3511), **Osaka** (☎ 06/6345-2189 or 06/6643-2125), **Kobe** (☎ 078/303-1010), **Okayama** (☎ 086/256-2000), **Kurashiki** (☎ 086/475-0543), **Hiroshima** (☎ 082/247-9715), **Fukuoka** (☎ 092/733-2220), **Kumamoto** (☎ 096/359-2121), and **Miyazaki** (☎ 0985/32-8457). For more information, call the **Tourist Information Center** in Tokyo (☎ 03/3201-3331) or the city's local tourist office.

children talked freely to her child (they never seemed to have a language barrier), while Janie was able to talk to parents about their children. Complete strangers she met on a train even invited her and her daughter home; in contrast, some Japanese people she has known for years have never invited her home, preferring instead to meet at coffee shops or restaurants.

Another good way to meet the Japanese is to stay in a *minshuku*, an inexpensive lodging in a private home (see “Tips on Accommodations,” in chapter 2). Also, national newspapers and local newsletters in English list **international club activities**; you may be able to hook up with, say, a hiking or skiing group composed of both Japanese and international members.

Finally, you can meet locals and learn about destinations at the same time through **Goodwill Guides**, a national organization of volunteers (mostly retirees, housewives, and students) who donate their time to guide you around their city free of charge (you pay their travel expenses, admission fees to sights,

and meals). There are Goodwill Guides in cities throughout Japan, including Fukuoka, Kumamoto, Beppu, Miyazaki, Kagoshima, Takamatsu, Matsuyama, Hiroshima, Himeji, Kurashiki, Matsue, Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Nara, Kanzawa, Matsumoto, Tokyo, Yokohama, Kamakura, Atami, Ito, and Nikko. Reservations for a guide must be made in advance. For more information, ask for the pamphlet “Goodwill Guide Groups of Japan Welcome You” at Tourist Information Centers in Tokyo, Kyoto, or Narita or Kansai international airports.

ETIQUETTE

Much of Japan’s system of etiquette and manners stems from its feudal days, when the social hierarchy dictated how a person spoke, sat, bowed, ate, walked, and lived. Failure to comply with the rules would bring severe punishment, even death. More than one Japanese literally lost his head for committing a social blunder.

Of course, nowadays it’s quite different, although the Japanese still attach much importance to proper behavior. As a foreigner, however, you can get away with a lot. After all, you’re just a “barbarian” and, as such, can be forgiven for not knowing the rules. There are two cardinal sins, however, you should never commit: One is you should **never wear your shoes into a Japanese home, traditional inn, temple, or any room with tatami**; the other is that you should **never wash with soap inside a communal Japanese bathtub**. Except for these two horrors, you will probably be forgiven any other social blunders (such as standing with your arms folded or your hands in your pockets).

As a sensitive traveler, however, you should try to familiarize yourself with the basics of Japanese social etiquette. The Japanese are very appreciative of foreigners who take the time to learn about their country and are quite patient in helping you. Remember, if you do commit a faux pas, apologize profusely and smile. They don’t chop off heads anymore.

Most forms of behavior and etiquette in Japan developed to allow relationships to be as frictionless as possible—a pretty good idea in a country as crowded as Japan. The Japanese don’t like confrontations, and fights are extremely rare. The Japanese are very good at covering almost all unpleasantness with a smile. Foreigners find the smile hard to read—a smiling Japanese face can mean happiness, sadness, embarrassment, or even anger. My first lesson in such physiognomic inscrutability happened on a subway in Tokyo, where I saw a middle-aged Japanese woman who was about to board the subway brutally knocked out of the way by a Japanese man rushing off the train. She almost lost her balance, but she gave a little laugh, smiled, and got on the train. A few minutes later, as the train was speeding through a tunnel, I stole a look at her and was able to read her true feelings on her face. Lost in her thoughts, she knitted her brow in consternation and looked most upset and unhappy. The smile had been a put-on.

Another aspect of Japanese behavior that sometimes causes difficulty for foreigners, especially in business negotiations, is **the reluctance of the Japanese to say no when they mean no**. Many consider such directness poor manners. As a result, they’re much more apt to say your request is very difficult, or they’ll simply beat around the bush without giving a definite answer. At this point, you’re expected to let the subject drop. Showing impatience, anger, or aggressiveness rarely gets you anywhere. Apologizing sometimes does. And if someone does give in to your request, you can’t thank them enough.

If you’re invited to a Japanese home, you should know that it’s both a rarity and an honor. Most Japanese consider their homes too small and humble for

entertaining guests, which is why there are so many restaurants, coffee shops, and bars. **If you're invited to a home, don't show up empty-handed.** Bring a small gift such as candy, fruit, flowers, or perhaps a souvenir from your hometown. Alcohol is also appreciated. And if someone does extend you a favor, be sure to thank them again the next time you see them—even if it's a year later.

When the Japanese give back change, they hand it back to you in a lump sum rather than counting it out. **Trust them.** It's considered insulting for you to sit there and count it in front of them, because this insinuates that you think they might cheat you. The Japanese are honest. It's one of the great pleasures of being in their country.

Don't blow your nose in public if you can help it, and never at the dinner table. It's considered most disgusting. On the other hand, even though the Japanese are very hygienic, they're not at all averse to spitting on the sidewalk. And, even more peculiar, the men urinate when and where they want, usually against a tree or a wall and most often after a night of carousing in the bars.

This being a man's society, men will walk in and out of doors and elevators before women, and in subways, they will sit down while women stand. Some Japanese men who have had contact with the Western world (particularly hotel staff) will make a gallant show of allowing a Western woman to step out of the elevator first. For the sake of women living in Japan, thank them warmly.

BOWING The main form of greeting in Japan is the bow rather than the handshake. Although at first glance it may seem simple enough, the bow—together with its implications—is actually quite complicated. The depth of the bow and the number of seconds devoted to performing it, as well as the total number of bows, depend on who you are, to whom you're bowing, and how they're bowing back. In addition to bowing in greeting, the Japanese also bow upon departing and to express gratitude. The proper form for a bow is to bend from the waist with a straight back and to keep your arms at your sides, but if you're a foreigner, a simple nod of the head is enough. Knowing foreigners shake hands, a Japanese may extend his hand, although he probably won't be able to stop himself from giving a little bow as well. (I've even seen Japanese bow when talking on the telephone.) Although I've occasionally witnessed Japanese businessmen shake hands among themselves, the practice is still quite rare. Kimono-clad hostesses of a high-end traditional Japanese inn will often kneel on tatami and bow to the ground as they send you off on your journey.

VISITING CARDS You're a nonentity in Japan if you don't have a visiting card, called a *meishi*. Everyone—from housewives to bank presidents—carries meishi to give out during introductions. If you're trying to conduct business in Japan, you'll be regarded suspiciously—even as a phony—if you don't have business cards. Meishi are very useful business tools for the Japanese. Likewise, a meishi can be used as an introduction to a third party—a Japanese may give you his meishi, scribble something on it, and tell you to present it to his cousin who owns a restaurant in Fukuoka. Voilà—the cousin will treat you like a royal guest.

As a tourist, you don't have to have business cards, but it certainly doesn't hurt, and the Japanese will be greatly impressed by your preparedness. The card should have your address and occupation on it; you might even consider having your meishi made in Japan, with the Japanese syllabic script (*katakana*) written on the reverse side.

Needless to say, there's a proper way to present a meishi. Turn it so that the other person can read it (that is, upside-down to you) and present it with both

hands and a slight bow. If you can, try to deliver your card underneath the card you are receiving, to show deference. Afterwards, it's customary for both of you to study the *meishi* for a moment and, if possible, to comment on it (such as, "You're from Kyoto? My brother lived in Kyoto!" or "Sony! What a famous company!"). If you're at a business meeting, place the card in front of you on the table; it's considered impolite to put the card away.

DINING Several dining customs in Japan differ from those in the West, many of them involving chopsticks or drinking. For information on dining etiquette and customs, refer to "Tips on Dining, Japanese Style," in chapter 2.

SHOES Nothing is so distasteful to the Japanese as the soles of shoes. Therefore, you should take off your shoes before entering a home, a Japanese-style inn, a temple, and even some museums and restaurants. Usually, there will be plastic slippers at the entranceway for you to slip on, but whenever you encounter tatami, you should take off even these slippers—only bare feet or socks are allowed to tread upon tatami.

Restrooms present another whole set of slippers. If you're in a home or a Japanese inn, you'll notice another pair of slippers—again plastic or rubber—sitting right inside the restroom door. Step out of the hallway plastic shoes and into the bathroom slippers, and wear these the whole time you're in the restroom. When you're finished, change back into the hallway slippers. If you forget this last changeover, you'll regret it—nothing is as embarrassing as walking into a room wearing toilet slippers and not realizing what you've done until you see the mixed looks of horror and mirth on the faces of the Japanese.

BATHING On my very first trip to Japan, I was certain I would never enter a Japanese bath. I was under the misconception that men and women bathed together, and I couldn't imagine getting into a tub with a group of smiling and bowing Japanese men. I needn't have worried—in almost all circumstances, bathing is gender segregated. There are some exceptions, primarily at outdoor hot-spring spas in the countryside, but the women who go to these are usually grandmothers who couldn't care less. Young Japanese women wouldn't dream of jumping into a tub with a group of male strangers.

Japanese baths are delightful. You find them at Japanese-style inns (*ryokan* and *minshuku*), at hot-spring spas (*onsen*), and at neighborhood baths (*sentō*); not everyone has his or her own bath in Japan. Sometimes Japanese baths are elaborate affairs with indoor and outdoor tubs, whirlpools, plants, and statues; sometimes they're nothing more than a tiny tub. Public baths have long been regarded as social centers for the Japanese—friends and co-workers will visit hot-spring resorts together; neighbors exchange gossip at the neighborhood bath. Sadly, however, the neighborhood bath has been in great decline over the past decades, as more and more Japanese acquire private baths. Hot-spring spas, however, remain hugely popular.

In any case, whether large or small, the procedure at all Japanese baths is the same. After completely disrobing in the changing room and putting your clothes in either a locker or a basket, hold a washcloth in front of you so that it covers your vital parts and walk into the bathing area. There, you'll find basins, stools (they used to be wood but are now mostly plastic), and faucets along the wall. Sit on the stool in front of a faucet and repeatedly fill your basin with water, splashing it all over you. If there's no hot water from the faucet, it's acceptable to dip your basin into the nearby hot bath. Soap yourself down and then rinse off completely—and I mean completely—all soap traces. After you're

squeaky-clean, you're ready to get into the hot bath (though since you're already clean, you might think of it more like a relaxing soak instead of a bath). When you've finished soaking, do not pull the plug. The same hot bath water is used by everyone.

Your first attempt at a Japanese bath may be painful—simply too scalding for comfort. It helps if you ease in gently and then sit perfectly still. You'll notice all tension and stiffness ebbing away. The Japanese are fond of baths, and many take them nightly, especially in winter, when a hot bath keeps them warm for hours afterward. If they're staying at a hot-spring spa, they'll use the baths both at night and again in the morning.

4 Dealing with the Language Barrier

Without a doubt, the hardest part of traveling in Japan is the language barrier. Suddenly you find yourself transported to a crowded land of 127 million people where you can neither speak nor read the language. To make matters worse, few Japanese speak English. And outside big cities and the major tourist sites, the menus, signs at train stations, and shop names are often in Japanese only.

However, millions of foreign visitors before you who didn't speak a word of Japanese have traveled throughout Japan on their own with great success. Much of the anxiety travelers experience elsewhere is eliminated in Japan because the country is safe and the people are kind and helpful to foreigners. In addition, the **Japan National Tourist Organization (JNTO)** does a super job of publishing helpful brochures, leaflets, and maps; and there are local tourist offices in almost all cities and towns, usually at train stations. The country has done a mammoth job during the past decade updating street signs, subway directions, and addresses in Roman letters, especially in Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, and other major cities.

If you need to ask directions of strangers in Japan, your best bet is to **ask younger people**. They have all studied English in school and are most likely to be able to help you. Japanese businessmen often know some English also. And as strange as it sounds, if you're having problems communicating with someone, **write it down** so he or she can read it. The emphasis in schools is on written rather than oral English (many English teachers can't speak English themselves), so Japanese who can't understand a word you say may know all the subtleties of syntax and English grammar. If you still have problems communicating, you can always call the Tourist Information Center (in Tokyo, call the TIC at ☎ 03/3201-3331; in Kyoto, ☎ 075/371-5649). It also doesn't hurt to arm yourself with a small pocket dictionary.

If you're heading out for a particular restaurant, shop, or sight, have your destination written down in Japanese by someone at your hotel. If you get lost along the way, look for one of the police boxes, called *koban*, found in virtually every neighborhood. They have maps of particular districts and can pinpoint exactly where you want to go if you have the address with you. Remember, too, that main train stations in major cities and tourist-resort areas have **tourist information offices** (*kanko annaijo*) that can help you with everything from directions to hotel reservations. The staff may not speak any English, but you shouldn't have trouble communicating your needs.

A glossary of simple phrases and words appears in appendix B of this book. In addition, realizing the difficulties that foreigners have with the language barrier in Japan, the JNTO has put out a nifty booklet called the *Tourist's*

Language Handbook. It contains basic sentences in English, with their Japanese equivalents, for almost every activity, from asking for directions, to shopping, to ordering in a restaurant, to staying in a Japanese inn. It also has a short list of useful Japanese phrases to help you get around on your own. Pick up a copy at a Tourist Information Center in Tokyo, in Kyoto, or at Narita or Kansai airports.

THE WRITTEN LANGUAGE No one knows the exact origins of the Japanese language, but we do know it existed only in spoken form until the 6th century. It was then that the Japanese borrowed the Chinese pictorial characters, called *kanji*, and used them to develop their own form of written language. Later, two phonetic alphabet systems, *hiragana* and *katakana*, were added to *kanji* to form the existing Japanese writing system. Thus, Chinese and Japanese use some of the same pictographs, but otherwise there's no similarity between the languages; while they may be able to recognize parts of each other's written language, the Chinese and Japanese cannot communicate verbally.

The Japanese written language—a combination of *kanji*, *hiragana*, and *katakana*—is probably one of the most difficult in the modern world. As for the spoken language, there are many levels of speech and forms of expression relating to a person's social status and sex. Even nonverbal communication is a vital part of understanding Japanese, because what isn't said is often more important than what is. It's little wonder that St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit missionary who came to Japan in the 16th century, wrote that Japanese was an invention of the devil designed to thwart the spread of Christianity. And yet, astoundingly, adult literacy in Japan is estimated to be 99%.

A note on establishment names: Many hotels and restaurants in Japan now have signs in *romaji* (Roman, or English-language, characters) in addition to their Japanese-character signs. For those that don't, take heart—appendix C contains the Japanese-character names of establishments recommended in this book that have signs in Japanese only; the appendix should help you recognize them.

OTHER HELPFUL TIPS It's worth noting that Japanese nouns do not have plural forms; thus, for example, *ryokan*, a Japanese-style inn, can be both singular and plural, as can *kimono*. Plural sense is indicated by context.

In addition, the Japanese custom is to list the family name first followed by the given name. That is the format I have followed in this book, but note that many things printed in English—business cards, city brochures, and so on—may follow the Western custom of listing the family name last.

And finally, you may find yourself confused because of suffixes attached to Japanese place names. For example, *dori* can mean street, avenue, or road; and sometimes it's attached to a street name with a hyphen, while at other times it stands alone. Thus, you may see Chuo-dori, Chuo Dori, or even Chuo-dori Avenue on English maps and street signs, but they're all one and the same street. Likewise, *dera* means “temple” and is often included at the end of the name, as in Kiyomizudera, which may be translated into English as Kiyomizu Temple; *jo* means castle and may appear at the end of a castle's name, as in Nijojo, or it may be left off and appear as Nijo Castle.

WRITTEN ENGLISH IN JAPAN English words are quite fashionable in Japanese advertising, with the result that you'll often see them on shop signs, posters, shopping bags, and T-shirts. However, the words are often wonderfully misspelled or are used in such unusual contexts that you can only guess at the original intent. What, for example, can possibly be the meaning behind TODAY BIRDS, TOMORROW MEN, which appeared below a picture of birds on a shopping

bag? In Okayama, I saw a shop whose name was a stern admonition to customers to GROW UP, while in Kyoto I saw the SELFISH coffee shop and the PITIFUL PUB. A staff member of the Hokkaido Tourist Association whose business card identified him working for the PROPAGANDA SECTION was probably more truthful than most. And imagine my consternation upon stepping onto a bathroom scale that called itself the BEAUTY-CHECKER. But the best sign I've seen was at the Narita Airport, where each check-in counter displayed a notice advising passengers they would have to pay a service-facility charge at THE TIME OF CHECK-IN FOR YOUR FRIGHT. I was unable to control my giggles as I explained to the perplexed man behind one counter what was wrong with the sign. Two weeks later, when I went back through the airport, I was almost disappointed to find that all signs had been corrected. But that's Japanese efficiency.

5 Cultural Snapshots: Japanese Arts in a Nutshell

TRADITIONAL THEATER

KABUKI Probably Japan's best-known traditional theater art, Kabuki is also one of the country's most popular forms of entertainment. Visit a performance and it's easy to see why—in a word, Kabuki is fun! The plays are dramatic, the costumes are gorgeous, the stage settings are often fantastic, and the themes are universal—love, revenge, and the conflict between duty and personal feelings. Probably one of the reasons Kabuki is so popular even today is that it developed centuries ago as a form of entertainment for the common people in feudal Japan, particularly the merchants. And one of Kabuki's interesting aspects is that all roles—even those depicting women—are portrayed by men.

Kabuki has changed little in the past 100 years. Altogether, there are more than 300 Kabuki plays, all written before the 20th century. Kabuki stages almost always revolve and have an aisle that extends from the stage to the back of the spectator theater. For a Westerner, one of the more arresting things about a Kabuki performance is the audience itself. Because this has always been entertainment for the masses, the audience can get quite lively with yells, guffaws, shouts of approval, and laughter. In fact, old woodcuts of cross-eyed men apparently stemmed from Kabuki—when things got a little too rowdy, actors would stamp their feet and strike a cross-eyed pose in an attempt to gain the audience's attention.

Of course, you won't be able to understand what's being said. Indeed, because much of Kabuki drama dates from the 18th century, even the Japanese sometimes have difficulty understanding the language. But it doesn't matter. Many theaters have programs and earphones that describe the plots in minute detail, often in English as well. Thus, you can follow the story and enjoy Kabuki just as much as everyone around you. The best place to enjoy Kabuki is Tokyo, where performances are held throughout much of the year.

NOH Whereas Kabuki developed as a form of entertainment for the masses, Noh was a much more traditional and aristocratic form of theater. Most of Japan's shogun were patrons of Noh; during the Edo Period, it became the exclusive entertainment of the samurai class. In contrast to Kabuki's extroverted liveliness, Noh is very calculated, slow, and restrained. The oldest form of theater in Japan, it has changed very little in the past 600 years. The language is so archaic that the Japanese cannot understand it at all, which explains in part why Noh does not have the popularity that Kabuki does.

As in Kabuki, all the performers are men. The subject matter of Noh's some 240 surviving plays is usually supernatural beings, beautiful women, mentally confused people, or tragic-heroic events. Performers often wear masks. Spoken parts are chanted by a chorus of about eight; music is provided by a Noh orchestra that consists of several drums and a flute.

Because the action is slow, watching an entire evening can be quite tedious unless you are particularly interested in Noh dance and music. In addition, most Noh plays do not have English translations. You may want to drop in for just a short while. In between Noh plays, short comic reliefs called *kyogen* usually make fun of life in the 1600s.

BUNRAKU Bunraku is traditional Japanese puppet theater. But contrary to what you might expect, Bunraku is for adults, and themes center on love and revenge, sacrifice and suicide. Many dramas now adapted for Kabuki were first written for the Bunraku stage.

Popular in Japan since the 17th century—at times even more popular than Kabuki—Bunraku is fascinating to watch because the puppeteers are right onstage with their puppets. Dressed in black, they're wonderfully skilled in making the puppets seem like living beings. Usually, there are three puppeteers for each puppet, which is about three-fourths human size: One puppeteer is responsible for movement of the puppet's head, as well as for the expression on its face, and for the movement of the right arm and hand; another puppeteer operates the puppet's left arm and hand; while the third moves the legs. Although at first the puppeteers are somewhat distracting, after a while you forget they're there as the puppets assume personalities of their own. The narrator, who tells the story and speaks the various parts, is an important figure in the drama. The narrator is accompanied by a traditional three-stringed Japanese instrument called a *shamisen*. By all means, try to see Bunraku. The most famous presentations are at the Osaka Bunraku Theater, but there are performances in Tokyo and other major cities as well.

THE TEA CEREMONY

Tea was brought to Japan from China more than 1,000 years ago. It first became popular among Buddhist priests as a means of staying awake during long hours of meditation; gradually, its use filtered down among the upper classes, and in the 16th century, the tea ceremony was perfected by a merchant named Sen-no-Rikyu. Using the principles of Zen and the spiritual discipline of the samurai, the tea ceremony became a highly stylized ritual, with detailed rules on how tea should be prepared, served, and drunk. The simplicity of movement and tranquillity of setting are meant to free the mind from the banality of everyday life and to allow the spirit to enjoy peace. In a way, it is a form of spiritual therapy.

The tea ceremony, *cha-no-yu*, is still practiced in Japan today and is regarded as a form of disciplinary training for mental composure and for etiquette and manners. In Kyoto, I once met a fellow guest in an inexpensive Japanese inn who asked whether she could serve me Japanese tea and a sweet after breakfast. She apologized for her ineptitude, saying she was only a mere apprentice of tea. When I asked how long she'd been studying cha-no-yu, she replied only 7 years. That may seem like a long time, but the study of the tea ceremony includes related subjects, including the craftsmanship of tea vessels and implements, the design and construction of the teahouse, the landscaping of gardens, and literature related to the tea ceremony.

 Fun Fact Sumo

The Japanese form of wrestling known as **sumo** began perhaps as long as 1,500 years ago and became immensely popular by the 6th century. Today, it's still popular, and the best wrestlers are revered as national heroes, much as baseball or basketball players are in the United States. Often taller than 6 feet and weighing well over 300 pounds, sumo wrestlers follow a rigorous training period, which usually begins when they're in their teens and includes eating special foods to gain weight. Unmarried wrestlers even live together at their training schools, called sumo stables.

A sumo match takes place on a sandy-floored ring less than 4.5m (15 ft.) in diameter. Wrestlers dress much as they did during the Edo Period—their hair in a samurai-style topknot, an ornamental belt-loincloth around their huge girths. Before each bout, the two contestants scatter salt in the ring to purify it from the last bout's loss; they also squat and then raise each leg, stamping it into the ground to crush, symbolically, any evil spirits. They then squat down and face each other, glaring to psych each other out. Once they rush each other, each wrestler's object is to either eject his opponent from the ring or cause him to touch the ground with any part of his body other than his feet. This is accomplished by shoving, slapping, tripping, throwing, and even carrying the opponent, but punching with a closed fist and kicking are not allowed. Altogether, there are 48 holds and throws, and sumo fans know all of them.

Most bouts are very short, lasting only 30 seconds or so. The highest-ranking players are called *yokozuna*, or grand champions; in 1993, a Hawaiian named Akebono was promoted to the highest rank, the first non-Japanese ever to be so honored.

There are six 15-day sumo tournaments in Japan every year: Three are held in Tokyo (Jan, May, and Sept); the others are held in Osaka (Mar), Nagoya (July), and Fukuoka (Nov). Each wrestler in the tournament faces a new opponent every day; the winner of the tournament is the wrestler who maintains the best overall record.

If you'd like to attend a sumo match while you're in Tokyo, see the "Spectator Sports" section of chapter 4. Tournament matches are also widely covered on television.

Several of Japan's more famous landscape gardens have teahouses on their grounds where you can sit on tatami, drink the frothy green tea (called *maccha*), eat sweets (meant to counteract the bitter taste of the tea), and contemplate the view. Teahouses are traditionally quite small and have room for five or fewer people. There's one entrance for the host and another for guests, so small that guests must crawl through it to enter. In the center of the room is a small brazier for the teapot along with utensils needed for the making of tea—tea bowl, tea caddy, bamboo whisk, and bamboo spoon. After hot water is added to powdered tea in the bowl and beaten with the whisk, the bowl is passed from guest

to guest. Tea etiquette requires that guests compliment the host on the excellent flavor of the tea and on the beauty of the tea implements, which of course change with the seasons and are often valuable art objects.

Several first-class hotels in Tokyo hold tea ceremonies in special tea-ceremony rooms; see chapter 4 for more information.

FLORAL & LANDSCAPE ARTS

IKEBANA Whereas a Westerner is likely to put a bunch of flowers into a vase and be done with it, the Japanese consider the arrangement of flowers an art in itself. Most young girls have at least some training in flower arranging, known as *ikebana*. First popularized among aristocrats during the Heian Period (A.D. 794–1192) and spreading to the common people in the 14th to 16th centuries, traditional *ikebana*, in its simplest form, is supposed to represent heaven, man, and earth; it's considered a truly Japanese art without outside influences. As important as the arrangement itself is the vase chosen to display it. Department store galleries sometimes have *ikebana* exhibitions, as do shrines; otherwise, check with the local tourist office.

GARDENS Nothing is left to chance in a Japanese landscape garden: The shapes of hills and trees, the placement of rocks and waterfalls—everything is skillfully arranged in a faithful reproduction of nature. To Westerners, it may seem a bit strange to arrange nature to look like nature; but to the Japanese, even nature can be improved upon to make it more pleasing through the best possible use of limited space. The Japanese are masters at this, as a visit to any of their famous gardens will testify.

In fact, the Japanese have been sculpting gardens for more than 1,000 years. At first, the gardens were designed for walking and boating, with ponds, artificial islands, and pavilions. As with almost everything else in Japanese life, however, Zen Buddhism exerted an influence, making gardens simpler and attempting to create the illusion of boundless space within a small area. To the Buddhist, a garden was not for merriment but for contemplation—an uncluttered and simple landscape on which to rest the eyes. Japanese gardens often use the principle of “borrowed landscape”—that is, the incorporation of surrounding mountains and landscape into the overall design and impact of the garden.

Basically, there are three styles of Japanese gardens. One style, called **tsukiyama**, uses ponds, hills, and streams to depict nature in miniature. Another style, known as the **karesansui**, uses stones and raked sand in place of water and is often seen at Zen Buddhist temples; it was developed during the Muromachi Period as a representation of Zen spiritualism. The third style, called **chaniwa**, emerged with the tea ceremony and is built around a teahouse with an eye toward simplicity and tranquillity; such a garden will often feature stone lanterns, a stone basin filled with water, or water flowing through a bamboo pipe.

Famous gardens in Japan include Kenrokuen Park in Kanazawa, Korakuen Park in Okayama, and Ritsurin Park in Takamatsu. Kyoto alone has about 50 gardens, including the famous Zen rock gardens at Daitokuji and Ryoanji temples, the gardens at both the Golden and Silver pavilions, and those at Heian Shrine, Nijo Castle, and the Katsura Imperial Villa.

Appendix B:

A Glossary of Useful Japanese Terms

Needless to say, it takes years to become fluent in Japanese, particularly in written Japanese, with its thousands of *kanji*, or Chinese characters, and its many hiragana and katakana characters. If you know even a few words of Japanese, however, they will not only be useful but will delight the Japanese people you meet in the course of your trip.

PRONUNCIATION

In pronouncing the following vocabulary, keep in mind that there's very little stress on individual syllables (pronunciation of Japanese is often compared to Italian). Here's an approximation of some of the sounds of Japanese:

a as in *father*

e as in *pen*

i as in *see*

o as in *oh*

oo as in *oooh*

u as in *boo*

g as in *gift* at the beginning of words; like “**ng**” in “*sing*” in the middle or at the end of words

Vowel sounds are almost always short unless they are pronounced doubled, in which case you hold the vowel a bit longer. *Okashi*, for example, means “a sweet,” whereas *okashii* means “strange.” As you can see, even slight mispronunciation of a word can result in confusion or hilarity. (Incidentally, jokes in Japanese are nearly always plays on words.) Similarly, double consonants are given more emphasis than only one consonant by itself.

USEFUL WORDS & PHRASES

BASIC TERMS

Good morning **Ohayo gozaimasu**

Good afternoon **Konnichiwa**

Good evening **Konbanwa**

Good night **Oyasuminasai**

Hello **Haro** (or **Konnichiwa**)

How are you? **Ogenki desu ka?**

How do you do? **Hajimemashite?**

Good-bye **Sayonara (or Bye-bye!)**

Excuse me/Pardon me/I'm sorry **Sumimasen**

Please (when offering something) **Dozo**

Please (when requesting something) **Kudasai**

Please (go ahead) **Doozo**

Thank you **Domo arigatoo**

You're welcome **Doo-itashimashite**

Yes **Hai**

No **Iie**

BASIC QUESTIONS & EXPRESSIONS

I'm American **Amerikajin desu**
 I'm Canadian **Canadajin desu**
 I'm English **Eikokujin desu**
 Sorry, I don't speak Japanese **Sumimasen, Nihongo was wakarimasen**
 Do you understand English? **Eigo wa wakarimasu ka?**
 Do you understand? **Wakarimasu ka?**
 I understand **Wakarimasu**
 I don't understand **Wakarimasen**
 Can I ask you a question? **Otazune shitaino desu ka?**
 Just a minute, please **Chotto matte kudasai**
 How much is it? **Ikura desu ka?**
 It's expensive **Takai desu**
 It's cheap **Yasui desu**
 Where is it? **Doko desu ka?**
 When is it? **Itsu desu ka?**
 What is it? **Kore-wa, nan-desu-ka?**
 I like it **Suki desu** (pronounced "ski")
 Where is the toilet? **Toire wa, doko desu ka?**
 My name is . . . [Your name] **to mo shimasu**
 What is your name? **O-namae wa, nan desu ka?**
 What time do you open/close? **Nanji ni akimasuka? Nanjini shimarimasuka?**
 Credit card **Kurejitto kaado**
 Too expensive **Takasugimasu**
 This one **Kore**
 That one **Are**

TRAVEL EXPRESSIONS & DIRECTIONALS

Where is . . . ? **Doko desu ka . . . ?**
 Where is the train station? **Eki wa, doko desu ka?**
 Train station **Eki**
 Airport **Kuukoo**
 Subway **Chika-tetsu**
 Bus **Bus-u**
 Taxi **Takushi**
 Airplane **Hikooki**
 Train **Densha**
 Bullet train **Shinkansen**
 Limited express train (long distance) **Tokkyu**
 Ordinary express train (doesn't stop at every station) **Kyuko**
 Rapid train **Kaisoku densha**
 Local train (one that stops at every station) **Kakueki teisha** (or **futsu**)
 I would like a reserved seat, please. **Shiteiseki o kudasai.**
 I would like a seat in the nonsmoking car, please. **Kinensha no shiteiski o kudasai.**
 Unreserved seat **Jiyuseki**
 Platform **Platt-homu**
 Ticket **Kippu**
 Destination **Ikisaki**
 One-way ticket **Katamichi-kippu** (or **katamichiken**)

- Round-trip ticket **Ofuku-kippu** (or **ofukuken**)
 I would like to buy a ticket. **Kippu ichimai o kaitai no desu kedo.**
 I would like to buy two tickets. **Kippu nimai o kaitai no desu kedo.**
 Exit **Deguchi**
 Entrance **Iriguchi**
 North **Kita**
 South **Minami**
 East **Higashi**
 West **Nishi**
 Left **Hidari**
 Right **Migi**
 Straight ahead **Massugu** (or **zutto**)
 Is it far? **Toi desu ka?**
 Is it near? **Chikai desu ka?**
 I'm lost **Maigoni narimashita.**
 Can I walk there? **Aruite ikemasu ka?**
 Street **Dori** (or **michi**)
 Tourist Information Office **Kanko annaijo** (or **kanko kyokai**)
 Where is the tourist office? **Kanko annaijo, doko desu ka?**
 May I have a map, please? **Chizu o kudasai?**
 Police **Keisatsu**
 Police box **Koban**
 Post office **Yubin-kyoku**
 I'd like to buy a stamp. **Kitte o kaitai no desu kedo.**
 Bank **Ginko**
 Hospital **Byooiin**
 Drugstore **Yakkyoku**
 Convenience store **Konbiniensu stoa**
 Embassy **Taishkan**
 Department store **Depaato**
 Downtown area **Hanka-gai**
 Passport **Pasupooto**
 I want to go to **e ikitai desu.**
 I want to go to the station. **Eki e ikitai desu.**
 What time does . . . leave . . . **nanjini shuppatsu desu ka?**
 Train **Densha**
 Subway **Chikatetsu**
 Bus **Basu**
 Ferry **Ferii**

LODGING TERMS

- Hotel **Hoteru**
 Japanese-style inn **Ryokan**
 Youth hostel **Yusu hosuteru**
 Cotton kimono **Yukata**
 Room **Heya**
 Do you have a room available? **Heya ga arimasu ka?**
 Does that include meals? **Shokuji wa tsuite imasu ka?**
 Tax **Zei**
 Service charge **Saavice**
 Key **Kagi**

Balcony **Baranda**

Hot-spring spa **Onsen**

Outdoor hot-spring bath **Rotenburo**

Bath **Ofuro**

Public bath **Sento**

Where is the nearest public bath? **Ichiban chikai sento wa, doko desu ka?**

I would like a room with one bed, two beds. **Singeru (single bed), Duberu (double-size bed), Tsuin (twin beds) no heya o onegaishimasu.**

Does it have a private bathroom? **Heya ni wa ofuro (tub) toile (toilet) ga tsuitemasuka?**

I'd like a private bathroom. **Basu toile tsuki no heya o onegaishimasu.**

Does the window open? **Kono mado wa akimasuka?**

DINING TERMS & PHRASES

Restaurant **Resutoran** (serves Western-style food)

Dining hall **Shokudo** (usually serves Japanese food)

Coffee shop **Kissaten**

Japanese pub **Izakaya** or **Nomiya**

Western food **Yoshoku**

Japanese food **Washoku**

Breakfast **Chosoku**

Lunch **Ohiru/lanchi**

Dinner **Yushoku**

I'd like to make a reservation. **Yoyaku oneigai shimasu.**

I'd like to pay the bill. **Okanjo o oneigai shimasu.**

Menu **Menyu**

Japanese green tea **Ocha**

Black (Indian) tea **Kocha**

Coffee **Koohi**

Water **Mizu**

Lunch or daily special, set menu **Teishoku** (Japanese food)

Lunch or daily special, set menu **Cosu**, or **seto** (usually Western food)

This is delicious. **Oishii desu.**

Thank you for the meal. **Gochisoo-sama deshita.**

I would like a fork, please. **Foku o kudasai.**

I would like a spoon, please. **Saji o kudasai.**

I would like a knife, please. **Naifu o kudasai.**

May I have some more, please? (if you're asking for liquid, such as more coffee, or food) **Mo skoshi o kudasai?**

May I have some more, please? (if you're asking for another bottle—say, of soda or sake) **Mo ipon o kudasai?**

May I have some more, please? (if you asking for another cup—say, of coffee or tea) **Mo ippai o kudasai?**

I would like sake, please. **Osake o kudasai.**

I would like a cup of coffee, please. **Koohii o ippai o kudasai.**

I would like the set meal, please. **Seto o kudasai** or **Teishoku o kudasai.**

Soda **Tansan**

Salt **Shio**

Pepper **Koshoo**

Baked **Yaku**

Fried **Ageru/furai**
 Not fried **Agemonode nai**
 Broiled **Yaku**
 Steamed **Musu**
 Grilled **Yaki**
 Well done **Yoku yaku**
 Rare **Nama**
 I'm a vegetarian **Saishokushugisha desu**
 I can't eat meat/pork **Oniku/butaniku ga taberemasen**
 I'm allergic to **no alelugii desu**
 Nuts **Nattsu/kinomi**
 Peanuts **Piinuttsu**
 Milk **Gyuunyuu/miruku**
 Shellfish **Kai**

FOOD

Ayu A small river fish; a delicacy of western Japan.
Anago Conger eel.
Chu-hai Shochu Shochu mixed with soda water and flavored with syrup and lemon (see below).
Dengaku Lightly grilled tofu (see below) coated with a bean paste.
Dojo Small, eel-like river fish.
Fugu Pufferfish (also known as blowfish or globefish).
“Genghis Khan” Mutton and vegetables grilled at your table.
Gohan Rice.
Gyoza Chinese fried pork dumplings.
Kaiseki Formal Japanese meal consisting of many courses and served originally during the tea ceremony.
Kamameshi Rice casserole topped with seafood, meat, or vegetables.
Kushiage (also **kushikatsu** or **kushiyaki**) Deep-fried skewers of chicken, beef, seafood, and vegetables.
Maguro Tuna.
Makizushi Sushi (see below), vegetables, and rice rolled inside dried seaweed.
Miso Soybean paste, used as a seasoning in soups and sauces.
Miso-shiru Miso soup.
Mochi Japanese rice cake.
Nabemono Single-pot dish of chicken, beef, pork, or seafood, stewed with vegetables.
Natto Fermented soybeans.
Nikujaga Stew of beef, potato, and carrot, flavored with sake (see below) and soy sauce; popular in winter.
Oden Fish cakes, hard-boiled eggs, and vegetables, simmered in a light broth.
Okonomiyaki Thick pancake filled with meat, fish, shredded cabbage, and vegetables or noodles, often cooked by diners at their table.
Ramen Thick, yellow Chinese noodles, served in a hot soup.
Sake (also **Nihon-shu**) Rice wine.
Sansai Mountain vegetables, including bracken and flowering fern.
Sashimi Raw seafood.

Shabu-shabu Thinly sliced beef quickly dipped in boiling water and then dipped in a sauce.

Shochu Japanese whiskey, made from rice, wheat, or potatoes.

Shojin-ryori Japanese vegetarian food, served at Buddhist temples.

Shoyu Soy sauce.

Shumai Steamed Chinese pork dumplings.

Soba Buckwheat noodles.

Somen Fine white wheat vermicelli, eaten cold in summer.

Sukiyaki Japanese fondue of thinly sliced beef cooked in a sweetened soy sauce with vegetables.

Sushi (also **nigiri-zushi**) Raw seafood placed on top of vinegared rice.

Tempura Deep-fried food coated in a batter of egg, water, and wheat flour.

Teppanyaki Japanese-style steak, seafood, and vegetables cooked by a chef on a smooth, hot, tableside grill.

Tofu Soft bean curd.

Tonkatsu Deep-fried pork cutlets.

Tonkotsu Pork that has been boiled for several hours in miso, shochu, and brown sugar.

Udon Thick white wheat noodles.

Unagi Grilled eel.

Wasabi Japanese horseradish, served with sushi.

Yakisoba Chinese fried noodles, served with sautéed vegetables.

Yakitori Charcoal-grilled chicken, vegetables, and other specialties, served on bamboo skewers.

Yudofu Tofu simmered in a pot at your table.

MATTERS OF TIME

Now	Ima	Morning	Asa
Later	Sto de	Night	Yoru
Today	Kyoo	Afternoon	Gogo
Tomorrow	Ashita	Holiday	Yasumi (or kyujitsu)
Day after tomorrow	Asatte	Weekdays	Heijitsu
Yesterday	Kinoo	1 hour	Ichijikan
Which day?	Nan-nichi desu ka?	2 hours	Nijikan
What time is it?	Nan-ji desu ka?	8 hours	Hachijikan
Daytime	Hiruma		

DAYS OF THE WEEK

Sunday	Nichiyoobi	Thursday	Mokuyoobi
Monday	Getsuyoobi	Friday	Kinyoobi
Tuesday	Kayoobi	Saturday	Doyoobi
Wednesday	Suiyoobi		

MONTHS OF THE YEAR

January	Ichigatsu	July	Shichigatsu
February	Nigatsu	August	Hachigatsu
March	San-gatsu	September	Kyuu-gatsu
April	Shigatsu	October	Juu-gatsu
May	Go-gatsu	November	Juuichi-gatsu
June	Rokugatsu	December	Juuni-gatsu

NUMBERS

1	Ichi	20	Nijuu
2	Ni	30	Sanjuu
3	San	40	Shijuu (or yonjuu)
4	Shi	50	Gojuu
5	Go	60	Rokujuu
6	Roku	70	Nanajuu
7	Shichi (or nana)	80	Hachijuu
8	Hachi	90	Kyuujuu
9	Kyuu	100	Hyaku
10	Juu	1,000	Sen
11	Juuichi	10,000	Ichiman
12	Juuni		

OTHER GENERAL NOUNS

Fusuma Sliding paper doors.

Gaijin Foreigner.

Geta Wooden sandals.

Haori Short kimono-like jackets (sometimes worn over a kimono), traditionally worn by men.

Irori Open-hearth fireplace.

Izakaya (or **Nomiya**) A Japanese-style bar or pub, with beer, sake, and Japanese food, generally open only from 5 or 6pm.

Jinja Shinto shrine.

Kotatsu Heating element placed under a low table (which is covered with a blanket) for keeping your legs warm; used in place of a heater in traditional Japanese homes.

Minshuku Inexpensive lodging in a private home; the Japanese equivalent of a European pension.

Nihonjin Japanese person.

Noren Short curtains hung outside shops and restaurants to signify they are open.

Rotenburo Outdoor hot-spring bath.

Shoji White paper sliding windows.

Tatami Rice mats.

Tera (or **dera**) Temple.

Tokonoma Small, recessed alcove in a Japanese room used to display a flower arrangement, scroll, or art object.

Torii Entrance gate of a Shinto shrine, consisting usually of two poles topped with one or two crossbeams.

Washlet Bidet toilet.

Yukata Cotton kimono worn for sleeping.

Zabuton Floor cushions.

Appendix C:

A Japanese-Character Index of Establishment Names

CHAPTERS 3 & 4 TOKYO

DINING

1 Sushiko 寿司幸	16 Daikokuya 大黒屋
2 Donto どんと	17 Namiki Yabusoba 並木薮蕎麦
3 Ginza Daimasu 銀座大増	18 Sometaro 染太郎
4 Kushi Colza 串コルザ	19 Izu'e 伊豆栄
5 Ohmatsuya 大松屋	20 Kakiden 柿伝
6 Rangetsu らん月	21 Kappoya Yaozen 八百善
7 Atariya 当り屋	22 Tsunahachi つな八
8 Fukusuke 福助	23 Hakkaku 八角
9 Shabusen しゃぶせん	24 Genkaya Shabu-Shabu Kan げんかやしゃぶしゃぶ館
10 Tentake 天竹	25 Harajuku Gyoza Lou 原宿餃子樓
11 Edogin 江戸銀	26 Heirokezushi 平禄寿司
12 Sushi Dai 寿司大	27 Toriyoshi 鳥良
13 Komagata Dojo 駒形どぜう	28 Inakaya 田舎屋
14 Mugitoro むぎとろ	29 Takamura 簗
15 Chinya ちんや	30 Fukuzushi 福鮎

31 Bikkuri Sushi
びっくり寿司

32 Ganchan
がんちゃん

33 Honoji
ほの字

34 Ichioku
一億

35 Torigin
鳥ぎん

36 Hayashi
はやし

37 Zakuro
ざくろ

SHOPPING

38 Lemon
レモン

NIGHTLIFE

39 Lupin
ルパン

40 Fukuriki Ichiza
福力市座

41 Volga
ボルガ

CHAPTER 5 SIDE TRIPS FROM TOKYO

KAMAKURA

42 Kamakura Oboro
鎌倉おぼろ

43 Miyokawa
御代川

44 Raitei
擂亭

NIKKO

45 Hippari Tako
ひっぱり凧

HAKONE

46 Ichinoyu
一の湯

THE IZU PENINSULA

Atami

47 Kiunkaku
起雲閣

48 Taikanso
大観荘

49 Home Run Sushi
ほーむらん寿司

Ito

50 Tokaikan
東海館

51 Ito-en Hotel
伊東園ホテル

52 Ryokan Inaba
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53 Fujiichi
ふじいち

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54 Matsumoto Folkcraft Museum
松本民芸館

55 Suzuki Shinichi Memorial Hall
鈴木鎮一 記念館

56 Kurano Yado Ichiyama
蔵の宿いちやま

57 Marumo
まるも

58 Hotel Ikkyu
ホテル 一休

59 Kura
蔵

60 Nomugi
野麦

61 Sano-Haru
佐の春

62 Shikimi
しき美

TSUMAGO & MAGOME

- 63 Tsumago
妻籠
- 64 Magome
馬籠
- 65 Ryokan Fujioto
旅館 藤乙

TAKAYAMA

- 66 Hida Takayama
Museum of Art
飛騨高山春慶会館
- 67 Lion Dance Ceremony
Exhibition Hall
獅子會館
- 68 Nagase
長瀬
- 69 Antique Inn Sumiyoshi
寿美よし
- 70 Kakusho
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- 71 Suzuya
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& OGIMACHI**

- 73 Doburoku Matsuri no Yakata
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- 74 Gasshozukuri Seikatsu
Shiryokan
合掌造生活資料館
- 75 Wada Ke
和田家
- 76 Jyuemon
十右エ門
- 77 Koemon
幸工門

- 78 Nodaniya
のだにや
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いろり

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- 80 Kinmata
近又
- 81 Kinoe
き乃え
- 82 Myorenji Temple
妙蓮寺
- 83 Izusen
泉仙
- 84 Misogi-gawa
禊川
- 85 Kushi Kura
串くら
- 86 Tagoto
田ごと
- 87 Tofujaya
豆腐茶屋
- 88 Bio-Tei
びお亭
- 89 Ganko Sushi
がんこ寿司
- 90 Gontaro
権太呂
- 91 Musashi
むさし
- 92 Omen
おめん
- 93 Hyotei
瓢亭
- 94 Manyoken
萬養軒

- 95 Mikaku
みかく
- 96 Minoko
美濃幸
- 97 Isobe
いそべ
- 98 Okutan
奥丹
- 99 Chorakukan
長楽館
- 100 Goemonjaya
五右衛門茶屋
- 101 Kodaiji Rakusho Tea Room
洛匠
- 102 Eikando Temple (Zenrinji Temple)
永観堂 (禅林寺)
- 103 Aritsugu
有次
- 104 Miyawaki Baisen-an
宮脇賣扇庵

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- 105 Chuguji Temple
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- 106 Kikusuiro
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- 109 Yamamoto-ya Honten
山本屋本店
- 110 Torigin Honten
鳥銀本店
- 111 Yabaton
矢場とん

ISE-SHIMA NATIONAL PARK

- 112 Okageza
おかげ座
- 113 Akafuku
赤福
- 114 Ise-Kawasaki Shonin-Kan
伊勢河崎商人館
- 115 Asakichi
麻吉
- 116 Hoshidekan
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- 117 Ishiyama-So
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- 118 Sushi Kyu
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- 119 Osakaya
大阪屋

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- 120 Ishikawa Prefectural
Art Museum
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- 121 Seisonkaku Villa
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- 122 Shima Geisha House
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- 123 Myoryuji Temple
妙立寺
- 124 Kaga Yuzen
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- 125 Sakuda
さくだ
- 126 Shamisen no Fukushima
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- 127 Tawaraya Ame
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陽月
- 129 Miyoshian
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浜長

131 Kitama
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132 To Mu
兎夢

133 Kotobuki-Ya
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134 Kaen
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135 Okonomiyaki Madonna
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136 Kani Doraku
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137 Bar Tachibana
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138 Fugetsu
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139 Kin-no-Yu
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140 Gin-no-Yu
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141 Steakland Kobe
ステーキランド KOBE

142 Hyotan
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MT. KOYA

143 Kongobuji Temple
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144 Reihokan Museum
靈宝館

145 Ekoin
恵光院

146 Fudoin Temple
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147 Rengejoin Temple
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148 Shojoshinin
清浄心院

149 Tentokuin
天徳院

HIMEJI

150 Koko-en
好古園

151 Asaka Sushi
あさ香すし

152 Fukutei
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153 Kassui-ken
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154 Yumeji Art Museum
夢二郷土美術館

155 Okayama Prefectural
Product Center
岡山県観光物産センター

156 Matsunoki
まつのき旅館

157 Matsunoki-Tei
まつのき亭

158 Okabe
おかべ

159 Shikisai
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160 Yamadome
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161 Ohashi House
大橋家住宅

162 Orgel Musée
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163 Ryokan Kurashiki
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164 Tsurugata
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- 167 Teahouse Meimei-an
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- 168 Buke Yashiki
武家屋敷
- 169 Gesshoji Temple
月照寺
- 170 Horaíso
蓬莱荘
- 171 Minami-Kan
皆美館
- 172 Matsue Urban Hotel Annex
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- 173 Ryokan Terazuya
旅館寺津屋
- 174 Daikichi
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- 175 Izakaya Ten
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- 176 Kaneyasu
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- 177 Yakumoan
八雲庵

HIROSHIMA

- 178 Mitakiso
三瀧荘
- 179 Sera Bekkan
世羅別館
- 180 Rijyo Kaikan
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- 181 Kanawa
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Caribbean Ports of Call	Munich & the Bavarian Alps	Thailand
Carolinas & Georgia	Nashville & Memphis	Tokyo
Chicago	Newfoundland & Labrador	Toronto
China	New England	USA
Colorado	New Mexico	Utah
Costa Rica	New Orleans	Vancouver & Victoria
Cuba	New York City	Vermont, New Hampshire & Maine
Denmark	New York State	Vienna & the Danube Valley
Denver, Boulder & Colorado Springs	New Zealand	Virgin Islands
England	Northern Italy	Virginia
Europe	Norway	Walt Disney World® & Orlando
Europe by Rail	Nova Scotia, New Brunswick & Prince Edward Island	Washington, D.C.
European Cruises & Ports of Call	Oregon	Washington State
	Ottawa	
	Paris	

FROMMER'S® DOLLAR-A-DAY GUIDES

Australia from \$50 a Day	Ireland from \$80 a Day	Washington, D.C. from \$80 a Day
California from \$70 a Day	Italy from \$70 a Day	Portable London from \$90 a Day
England from \$75 a Day	London from \$90 a Day	Portable New York City from \$90 a Day
Europe from \$70 a Day	New York from \$90 a Day	Portable Paris from \$90 a Day
Florida from \$70 a Day	Paris from \$90 a Day	
Hawaii from \$80 a Day	San Francisco from \$70 a Day	

FROMMER'S® PORTABLE GUIDES

Acapulco, Ixtapa & Zihuatanejo	Florence	Phoenix & Scottsdale
Amsterdam	Frankfurt	Portland
Aruba	Hong Kong	Puerto Rico
Australia's Great Barrier Reef	Las Vegas	Puerto Vallarta, Manzanillo & Guadalajara
Bahamas	Las Vegas for Non-Gamblers	Rio de Janeiro
Berlin	London	San Diego
Big Island of Hawaii	Los Angeles	San Francisco
Boston	Los Cabos & Baja	Savannah
California Wine Country	Maine Coast	Vancouver
Cancún	Maui	Vancouver Island
Cayman Islands	Miami	Venice
Charleston	Nantucket & Martha's Vineyard	Virgin Islands
Chicago	New Orleans	Washington, D.C.
Disneyland®	New York City	Whistler
Dominican Republic	Paris	
Dublin		

FROMMER'S® NATIONAL PARK GUIDES

Algonquin Provincial Park

Banff & Jasper

Family Vacations in the National
Parks

Grand Canyon

National Parks of the American
West

Rocky Mountain

Yellowstone & Grand Teton

Yosemite & Sequoia/Kings
Canyon

Zion & Bryce Canyon

FROMMER'S® MEMORABLE WALKS

Chicago

London

New York

Paris

San Francisco

FROMMER'S® WITH KIDS GUIDES

Chicago

Las Vegas

New York City

Ottawa

San Francisco

Toronto

Vancouver

Walt Disney World® & Orlando

Washington, D.C.

SUZY GERSHMAN'S BORN TO SHOP GUIDES

Born to Shop: France

Born to Shop: Hong Kong,
Shanghai & Beijing

Born to Shop: Italy

Born to Shop: London

Born to Shop: New York

Born to Shop: Paris

FROMMER'S® IRREVERENT GUIDES

Amsterdam

Boston

Chicago

Las Vegas

London

Los Angeles

Manhattan

New Orleans

Paris

Rome

San Francisco

Seattle & Portland

Vancouver

Walt Disney World®

Washington, D.C.

FROMMER'S® BEST-LOVED DRIVING TOURS

Austria

Britain

California

France

Germany

Ireland

Italy

New England

Northern Italy

Scotland

Spain

Tuscany & Umbria

THE UNOFFICIAL GUIDES®

Beyond Disney

Central Italy

Chicago

Cruises

Disneyland®

England

Florida

Florida with Kids

Inside Disney

Hawaii

Las Vegas

London

Mauit

Mexico's Best Beach Resorts

Mini Las Vegas

Mini-Mickey

New Orleans

New York City

Paris

San Francisco

Skiing & Snowboarding in the
West

Walt Disney World®

Walt Disney World® for

Grown-ups

Walt Disney World® with Kids

Washington, D.C.

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Booked aisle seat.

Reserved room with a view.

With a queen – no, make that a king-size bed.

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