

# Exploring the Tokyo Megalopolis

By JEF Editorial Section

## Tourism Destination Tokyo

WHAT is there to see in Tokyo and what can people experience there? As one of the world's most prominent metropolises, Tokyo is a hub of Asian industry, the center of Japanese business, finance and culture, as well as the country's fashion Mecca. With its long history, Tokyo offers a diverse blend of cultures and a unique combination of the past and the future. While home to Shinjuku, the city that never sleeps, and Akihabara, where crowds flock for IT and anime, Tokyo also offers magnificent natural surroundings that can offer exhilarating adventures such as whale watching off its islands. The diversity provides endless fascination for those who visit Tokyo.

The Tokyo Metropolitan Government has set a goal of attracting six million visitors annually. In support of this objective it is taking up various efforts including advertising campaigns and the rede-

velopment of tourist spots, as well as strengthening its capacity to host tourists. These efforts are especially focused on advertising. Tokyo is eagerly carrying out a campaign that includes running television spots in target markets featuring the Astro Boy character. Plans also include a unique word of mouth campaign in which Tokyo will invite foreigners residing in the metropolis on tours that showcase the charm of Tokyo. The metropolitan government hopes that after experiencing the wonders of Tokyo, the foreigners will spread the word to their compatriots upon returning to their respective home countries.

There are also strategies to promote Tokyo through a variety of media, including magazines, television series, films and the Internet. Visual images make the strongest impressions and can most effectively express the allure of Tokyo to potential visitors. The metropolitan government is opening the doors

to these opportunities by establishing a liaison office for filming and location related support called Tokyo Location Box and is also making the metropolitan government office and other government owned facilities available for use as film locations. It supports the production of films and television series in Tokyo to showcase the magnetism of the megalopolis to the world. Promoting Tokyo abroad using media content is critical to increasing tourism. In some Asian countries, Japanese TV drama series have become part of mainstream program, inspiring many fans of these programs to come to Tokyo to see firsthand where their favorite show was shot. This use as a location for a variety of films and TV series will create opportunities for Tokyo to develop new tourist spots. The film *Lost In Translation*, which was shot in Shinjuku and Shibuya, and won numerous awards, including the Oscar for Best Original Screenplay, offers an excellent



On the wave of a redevelopment effort scheduled to be completed in 2006, Akihabara is aiming to transform itself from its current role as a "shopping district" to an "experience and fun district." A point of interest in this transformation is an industrial tourism project in which products, services and intriguing local industries have been uniquely labeled as content from "Akiba," the nickname of the district. In this "Japan Renaissance Project" visitors from Japan and overseas come to the district to enjoy its surroundings and all the unique "Akiba content."

Despite having a prominent role as the "Electric Town" in post-war Japan, the growth of large-scale electric appliance retailers has eroded Akiba's appeal as the place to buy finished goods. More recently, the area has drawn

## Do Akiba! – Let's experience Akihabara –



Photo: Japan National Tourist Organization

attention as a hangout for the geek demographic, or those looking for parts for computers and IT- or anime-related products and figurines. Unfortunately, this trend has created an air of inaccessibility for the district. To remedy the situation, Akiba plans to offer tours that take visitors beyond shopping and sightseeing to a higher level of tourism called "Site-Doing" which involves interactive experiences that teach people the fun and skills required for different tasks. Planned activities, set to begin in late autumn, include building robots and figurines, performing voice-overs for anime, seminars by animation creators and tours of anime production facilities. ■

Japan Renaissance Project  
Website: <http://japan-r.net>

example of this effect. After the movie hit theaters there was a noticeable increase in interest in Tokyo, especially from the United States and Europe. Overseas, a few travel companies are offering tours that allow participants to experience the movie firsthand. Visual media definitely has a role in promoting tourism in Tokyo.

Tokyo has tourist information centers located in the metropolitan government office, Haneda Airport and Keisei Ueno Station. They offer transportation access guides, tourist spot guides and event guides. There are also free maps and "handy guides" complete with coupons for cultural sites. Unfortunately, the lack of tourist information centers that offer services for visitors such as hotel reservations, like those found overseas, is a serious draw-

back for Tokyo. However efforts are being made to increase the number of maps and tourist information resources for foreigners around the city in order to make Tokyo even more tourist-friendly.

### Tourism-Focused Urban Development

THERE are a variety of tourism resources located in Tokyo, but until now a disconnect between the city and its tourism resources has left many tourist spots isolated and scattered about the city. In response to these conditions, Tokyo intends to carry out urban development with the input of local citizens to create communities that can present a single face to attract tourists. In an effort to make tourism in Tokyo

more convenient and enjoyable, the city will initially clearly define a concept for each district, establish tourist information centers and create tour routes that facilitate making the rounds of isolated tourist spots. Furthermore, Tokyo is promoting a new form of tourism-focused urban development that creates convenience for both citizens and visitors. This includes creating and preserving unique neighborhoods, building accessible walking courses for the physically challenged and putting up more directional signs. The metropolitan government intends to increase the momentum by holding symposiums and seminars about nurturing leaders who can implement tourism-focused urban revitalization. To promote such a development, it plans to introduce a wide variety of development efforts such as



successful case studies and ideal methods.

As a designated tourism-focused urban development model district, the Ueno area has established a promotional committee with strong representation from cultural facilities, local shopping areas and the ward government. Ueno has many historic temples and shrines and a bounty of cultural assets such as museums and a zoo. It also has the commercial area of Ame-yoko and the sites of traditional industries such as the Kappabashi kitchenware street, which is famous for its food samples, and the cityscape of old downtown districts such as Asakusa and Yanaka, which is popular among foreigners as well. Despite this impressive collection of tourism resources, the area did not function as a single unit able to present the sum benefits of all its attractions. To integrate the assets, the ward is undertaking measures to become more convenient for visitors, including establishing a tourist information center, starting a volunteer guide program staffed by local residents, printing multilingual guide maps and posting maps around the area. Other services have been initiated such as opening an outdoor café in the Ueno park, illuminating important cultural assets such as historical buildings at night, and extending the opening hours of cultural facilities.



A temple in Ueno and its "ema," votive tablets

Improving the transportation network is essential in increasing the mobility of visitors. While the existing services in the area – JR Lines, subway lines (Tokyo Metro and Toei) and buses – offer a common one-day pass for ¥1,580, the introduction of the Megurin local bus service (currently considering the sale of a one-day pass) which operates two routes in the area, has greatly increased the mobility of visitors. In Asakusa, visitors can rent a bicycle (¥200 from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.) or hire a rickshaw (¥12,600 per hour) and for going around the town, a "water bus" can take them to Odaiba. By skillfully combin-

ing these transportation options, visitors can enjoy Tokyo's old downtown districts in a way that is not possible on conventional tours. Ueno's unique form of urban development, which allows visitors to experience history and culture, is making steady progress.

### Towards Navigable Public Transportation Systems

THE Tokyo Metropolitan area boasts extensive public transportation networks and there is no dearth of options for visitors on the move. However, this existing network is complicated and dif-

Hato Bus is the first name that comes to mind for many Tokyo residents when asked about sightseeing in the city. The company has been in business for 56 years and has an established reputation for sightseeing tours in Tokyo.

It started operating English tours for foreigners in 1952 based on the company's founding philosophy that a good understanding of other countries is essential for maintaining peace. The only tours initially available were mid-day ones of the Imperial Palace, Asakusa, and Ueno, but two years later, the company started offering night tours of the Kabuki-za Theatre and Japanese restaurants. The number and variety of

tours has increased and their content has been altered as needed in response to changing times. Hato Bus currently offers a total of 11 different tours in the city, including three standard full-day tours of notable sights as well as half-day tours and nighttime tours. The company's tours attract more than 60,000 foreign tourists every year (excluding group and chartered tours). The tours are revised each year and feature friendly guides who can answer any question about Japan. There are generally given in English, but guide tapes in

## Hato Bus

Spanish, Korean and Chinese are also available, and for large groups, the tours are conducted in the specified language.

The focus of the business has shifted in recent years from groups to individual tourists, who appear to be increasingly interested in experiencing the everyday lives of ordinary Japanese citizens and the hustle and bustle of city streets. Last year the company began offering walking tours that use public transportation. These tours have been especially popular. A growing number of foreign-

ers join the tours targeting Japanese citizens as these tours offer a wider range of choice. Tokyo has a strong image of being a modern city, but it also has history and natural beauty. The company hopes that tourists will enjoy the seasons, food, and first-hand experiences of Tokyo. Hato Bus is actively working to address a variety of issues, including barrier-free access and expanding the languages available beyond English, and it seeks to provide tours that are enjoyable to young and old alike and allow even seasoned travelers to discover a new Japan and a new Tokyo. ■

Assisted by Hato Bus



difficult to comprehend even for Japanese residents of Tokyo. The calculation of fares is also confusing. A more user-friendly public transportation system is necessary to facilitate regional tourism.

In spring 2004 the Toei and Tokyo Metro subway lines initiated a system of assigning alphabetic and numeric identifiers to train stations and lines called station numbering. Even without being able to read the name of a station, passengers are able to quickly identify their destination using the train line symbol and station number. Tokyo has installed information booths offering service in English at the entrances to

major terminal stations. In the past, train announcements were made in English on certain lines, but this service has now been expanded to cover all lines. In addition to English, rail line maps published by the metropolitan government are now available in a total of eight languages.

JR East, which has long offered English train announcements on its Shinkansen and Narita Express lines, has been expanding that service to include commuter routes within the metropolitan area since 2002. Other service improvements include ticket purchases by credit card (Their use in ticket vend-

ing machines is currently limited to reserved seating).

Rail companies in the metropolitan area are currently undertaking passenger-focused reforms including sharing tracks and sales of tickets that are good for more than one company's trains. Information guides are already easier to understand and enriched with better content. From the aspect of tourism promotion, we can anticipate the future will bring an increase of locales that accept credit and debit card transactions, less expensive one-day passes for tourists, and issuance of short-term passes that are valid for a few days. **JS**



Free guide books are available



# Attracting Foreign Tourists in Tokyo

## – Efforts of Small Japanese Inns in Old Downtown –


**S**AWANOYA, a small traditional Japanese inn located in Yanaka, has welcomed international tourists for 23 years. The inn initially began taking in foreign tourists as a last means of coping with financial difficulties, but these tourists quickly became a source of enjoyment for the family operating the inn as well as local residents. This has led various media, other Japanese inns and the government to ask about the secrets of promoting tourism. With only 12 rooms and accommodations for a total of 22 people, the inn has hosted 110,000 foreign visitors from 80 different countries, and foreigners account for 80% of its clientele. For Japanese tourists who equate sight-

seeing with an escape from everyday life, small family-run inns immersed in the sounds of daily life are not very popular. Nevertheless, this sense of everyday life seems exactly what international tourists are seeking, says Sawa, the owner of the inn. Guests enjoy meeting regular customers at local Japanese-style pubs, shopping in neighboring stores, picnicking in a nearby park, and showing visiting friends around the area. The guests and locals often become friends, and visit each other across national borders. The guests at Sawanoya have become fully integrated into the neighborhood environment.

Sawa's opinion is that if guests are welcomed by the whole neighborhood, then


it effectively allows guests to enjoy services that compare favorably to a major hotel. When checking in, he provides a map written in both Japanese and English that indicates the shops which are eager to welcome foreigners. Guests with this handmade map stroll through the neighborhood. Foreign tourists mingle at neighborhood festivals and other seasonal events. Sawa says this open atmosphere has its roots in the custom of old downtown Tokyo. Sawanoya also occasionally performs annual Japanese events, which allows guests to experience local traditions. The inn is popular with guests because they are able to walk down the street without being treated as strangers and can experience everyday

life in the same way as Japanese.

The majority of guests stay at Sawanoya are individual travelers, otherwise known as FIT (Foreign Independent Tourists). The FIT population is said to have risen to 60% of the foreign visitors in Japan, but the domestic facilities for receiving these visitors are still inadequate. Different customs and culture as well as language problems are some of the reasons why small family-run inns and traditional Japanese inns shy away from foreign guests. Sawa did not necessarily set out to operate an inn for foreigners. Despite a lack of language skills and inadequate facilities, he has gained expertise in hospitality services by actually taking in foreign visitors. Conversely, if he had not tried to bring in foreign guests, he would not understand what is necessary and what is not. A desire to welcome is important, he says. 



**H**OMEIKAN in Hongo is another Japanese inn that actively welcomes international tourists, but here as well, they do not receive special treatment just because they are foreigners. The main building was built in 1897 and is designated as an important tangible cultural asset. The Daimachi annex was added in 1950. Both are built in a traditional Japanese style. Guest rooms are furnished differently and the corridors are paved with black stones. Though quite beautiful, there are also many inconveniences. Senior employees speak little English. "But as guests at the inn come from a variety of countries, simply speaking English is not enough. Therefore, we have not taken any special proceeding measures,"

Koike, the inn's managing director explains. The few changes that have been made for foreigners include larger yukata and slippers, and western-style toilets. Koike says "our guests travel in order to enjoy Japan from their own perspective, so the typical services of an ordinary Japanese inn are sufficient." Accountability is important. A guest making a reservation receives an explanation that Homeikan is a typical Japanese inn with authentic Japanese-style facilities and cannot afford to offer special facilities for them. If they agree to these terms, then the reservation is accepted. Still, the inn has many repeat customers that stay in different rooms and thoroughly enjoy every nook and cranny of the buildings. 



OCCUPANCY rates for Japanese tourists fluctuate widely depending on the season, and for small Japanese inns, which are struggling with a decline in the number of guests, the presence of international tourists can be a real lifesaver. According to both Sawa and Koike, distributing information in English is the key to attracting them. The spread of the Internet has significantly reduced advertising costs. With an English website and an e-mail address, reservations can now be taken from anywhere in the

world. One survey indicated that nearly 90% of foreign guests staying at Japanese small inns and hotels obtained their information through the Internet. Reservations at both Sawanoya and Homeikan are primarily made directly without going through an agent, and though most are still taken through the con-

ventional methods of telephone and fax, the proportion of e-mail reservations is gradually increasing. The "ordinary Japan" is very appealing to international visitors, and repeat guests and word of mouth are steadily expanding the customer base. Put another way, unless information is distributed, customers will not come.

However, the hesitation at other Japanese inns is quite understandable. In addition to the problems of language and facilities, there are a host of other issues that

must be solved. The guaranteed reservation system used widely throughout the world is still not commonplace in Japan, and small inns are unable to accept overseas debit cards. Commission remittance fees are too high for them. If they are unable to prevent no-shows, small inns with a limited number of rooms are reluctant to accept foreign tourists.

Sawa and Koike have made several attempts to promote accepting foreign guests respectively, including the holding of lectures and the creation of a support organization. While increasing a neighborhood's allure is the key to attracting tourists, they are also cooperating with local communities and governments to revitalize their towns and neighborhoods. Their efforts are rewarded that the response of small Japanese inns and business hotels, many of which were previously not interested in accepting foreign guests, has begun to improve. A foreign guide book edited last year has a category for low-priced lodgings starting

at ¥3,500 for the first time.

The number of individual travelers who visit Japan for their own reasons is expected to continue to increase. A critical condition of being an international tourist city is, according to Sawa, that tourists have a variety of choice in lodging and sightseeing attractions. "Tokyo is beginning to satisfy this condition," he concluded.



## International travel in an IT society

ANDON Ryokan, opened in Minowa in June 2003, is keen to provide a complete range of information to guests. Its staff are all fluent in English and the signs inside the inn are posted in English. In addition to free Internet services in the lobby, all rooms are equipped with a TV, DVD player, and an

Internet connection. International phone cards are available at the front desk. The rooms are small and covered with four woven tatami mats, but the lobby has three different common spaces—a Japanese-style room, western style room and a terrace—and guests are welcome to use the open kitchen. With free beverages, guests are encouraged to enjoy the company of other guests and staff in these areas. The inn provides a variety of

sightseeing information and a handmade map of the neighborhood. If asked, the staff will also quickly search for and provide additional information. The 'friendly atmosphere of relaxing with family and friends' has been well received by guests, and the inn already has many repeat visitors. Because the inn will temporarily hold suitcases and other large items free of charge, it has many guests that come from Narita Airport and stay one or two

nights, travel to outlying regions, and then return for another night before going back to their home countries. The inn completely charges by the room, which is quite innovative for a Japanese inn.

An uncanny harmony has been achieved between a contemporary design and the dimly-lit atmosphere of old Japanese homes, and the soft lighting makes the entire building look like a single paper shade lamp at night. The idea of enjoying the shadows that faintly emerge in the dimly-lit rooms is a Japanese tradition that has become obsolete in recent times. The inn represents a new attempt in a corner of Tokyo to adhere strictly to a Japanese aesthetic while being completely modern and international. ■





# Ghibli Museum, Mitaka

SITUATED in the leafy environment of Inokashira Park, located a short distance from the heart of Tokyo, is an extraordinary museum that people of all ages can enjoy. Ghibli Museum, Mitaka embodies the vision of animation director Miyazaki Hayao and Studio Ghibli, which have produced films beloved around the world, including *Spirited Away*, *Princess Mononoke* and *My Neighbor Totoro*.

The museum is a magical place. The frescoed ceiling that greets visitors upon entering the museum arouses expectations of the fun to come. Tickets embedded with real 35 mm film are exchanged at the ticket booth. Peering at the light through the film to see what scenes are depicted, you come to a beautiful stained glass window of Totoro halfway up a set of stairs. Visitors can experience something of what it is like to make an animated film. In the first exhibit room, guests are enchanted by the vision of pictures and figurines – objects that do not normally exhibit motion – coming to life as though a spell had been cast on them. Appearing as if someone had just been working there,



Photo: © Museo d'Arte Ghibli © Disney/Pixar © Pixar

## Ticket Information

Entrance to the Ghibli Museum, Mitaka is strictly by advance purchase of a reserved ticket for specified dates. Please be aware that you will not be admitted to the museum if you do not purchase your ticket IN ADVANCE. The agents (ATC, JTB) who handle ticket sales differ by country. For details, please refer to the official URL: [http://www.ghibli-museum.jp/ticket\\_info.html](http://www.ghibli-museum.jp/ticket_info.html).

## For visitors from countries where tickets are not sold

In Japan, tickets may be purchased in advance at Lawson convenience stores. <http://www.lawson.co.jp/lawson-plus/ghibli/index.html>. (Japanese only)

JTB Sunrise Tours arranges a Ghibli Museum Afternoon tour on Mondays, Thursdays and Fridays. The decision to conduct a tour is made four days in advance, depending on the number of people who have signed up. You should contact JTB Sunrise Tours at least one day before you wish to participate.

JTB Sunrise Tours URL: <http://www.jtb.co.jp/sunrisetour/>  
Reservation & Information Tel: +81-3-5796-5454

the walls of “*Shonen no Heya* (A Boy’s Room)” are covered with illustrations and sketches and the room itself is overflowing with books and toys. One could easily spend all day in this room all day staring at them, imagining that this is surely how the artists go about creating their works.

Visitors are likely to lose their way, distracted by a powerful interest in everything there is to be seen. That is no wonder, since you are encouraged to wander and “get lost together” with the other visitors in this interactive museum. To encourage visitors to actually look, feel and experience the museum, photography is prohibited as a general rule. While there are no specially written placards in foreign languages (actually, there are no written explanations at all), each floor is posted with staff members who can speak English. The museum also has a licensed nurse. In response to

the recent increase in the number of overseas visitors, the museum provides guide brochures in five languages: English, French, Spanish, Korean and Chinese at the entrance.

A spiral staircase beside the huge, stuffed Cat Bus from *My Neighbor Totoro* leads to the roof garden, dominated by a robot soldier from *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*. Photographs can be taken here, and this is a good spot to snap a memento from your trip. Inside the museum there is a café located on a comfortable terrace as well as a gift shop selling exclusive goods including film cells from the movies that can only be purchased here. There is also a reading room where you can flip through picture books and children’s books recommended by Miyazaki Hayao and the museum. This might be a good place to look around for your own souvenirs from Japan. **JS**

Photo: © Museo d’Arte Ghibli



## Mitaka City and the Ghibli Museum

Do you know the character, Poki? It was created by Miyazaki Hayao to commemorate the establishment of the museum. Poki, which was drawn to resemble a baby hawk, was named by Mitaka residents and is now the city’s mascot. There is an attractive line of premium Poki merchandise that can only be obtained in Mitaka. The Mitaka Japanese Confectionery Association sells *manju*, a kind of Japanese bun made of rice, with kiwi fruit as the local specialty. The *manju* is called *Taka ni Mangetsu*, which plays on the word *taka* (hawk) from the name of the city and Poki, a

baby hawk. A group of people with disabilities makes handmade stationary sets embossed with an illustration of Poki. Poki even appears on official Mitaka City envelopes. The residents of Mitaka adore Poki.

The Ghibli Museum, Mitaka or The Mitaka Municipal Animation Museum opened in October 2001. The museum is managed by the Tokuma Memorial Cultural Foundation for Animation. While entrance to the museum is strictly by advance reservation, special admissions have been reserved for Mitaka residents. Children from local kindergartens and elementary schools visit the museum on school outings. Recently, local children were invited to spend the night at the museum. When the museum was completed, the city overhauled a stretch of road along the Tamagawa-josui stream from the train station to the museum. The *Kaze no Sampomichi* (Promenade of Winds), as it is called, is a beautiful brick walkway lined with trees and street lamps made to look like old-fashioned gas lamps. Statues and signs made with a wildcat character designed by Studio Ghibli point the way along the road to the museum. Benches have been installed along the way. The once dangerous path with many street crossings has been transformed into fun and safe walkway where people can enjoy nature around them. There is also a community bus service –the Mitaka City Bus, Ghibli-designed buses and Akatombo Bus (red

dragonfly bus), – with routes along even the narrowish streets in the city.

Even the local shopping districts have decorated their street lamps with Ghibli Museum flags, ratcheting up their ability to attract customers. Recently, new restaurants have opened up nearby, helping to reinvigorate the local scene.

Mitaka City has traditionally enjoyed strong community involvement by its residents. A number of unique groups exist, such as the Mitaka Tour Guide Association, a volunteer sightseeing group. Members of the group, along with other residents, hunt up unknown cultural assets around town and design original tours. Easy-to-follow sightseeing and dining maps showing the cafés and restaurants around Mitaka Station are available. Now we are just waiting anxiously for the day when English versions will be produced for the ever increasing number of foreign tourists. **■ © 2001 STUDIO GHIBLI**

