



Where to stay—and why BY THE EDITORS

THE 16 HOTELS TO KNOW



Tokyo has somewhat of a hotel problem: It doesn't have enough. The number of travelers to Japan in 2015 was estimated to have topped 19 million, a nearly 50 percent increase from 2014—and if the trend continues, visitors could reach 20 million this year, a target the government thought the country would hit in 2020, when it will host the Olympics. And hotels aren't being built fast enough to keep up with the influx: Tokyo properties were at 83 percent capacity for most of 2015. (By comparison, the United States occupancy rate in 2015 was 66 percent.) This year, DEPARTURES sent eight

editors to Tokyo for a cumulative 48 days, and at the 16 hotels we stayed in and recommend, almost every editor had reservation problems, including at the Imperial Hotel, which has 931 rooms!

That said, there's much to love about Tokyo hotels. Service is outstanding everywhere as the Japanese pride themselves on the art of hospitality, or *omotenashi*. It's not about meeting demands so much as anticipating them. Good service is part of the culture, which is why travelers aren't supposed to tip hotel staff. Many hotels are in skyscrapers, often on floors 30 and above, so views can be sensational. Generally, properties are tech oriented; panels with buttons to control most things in the



rooms are the norm. Also, bathrooms usually come stocked with neatly packaged amenity kits containing toothbrushes, toothpaste, brushes, combs, razors, shaving gel, hair turbans, you name it. Given the consistent quality among the properties, the factors to ponder regarding where to stay are location, ambience, and decor.

With 37.8 million people, Tokyo is the world's most populous metropolitan area—but ten of the luxury hotels on our list are within one concentrated zone where a cab ride from one end to the other takes only eight minutes.

Of these, the 24-floor **Peninsula Tokyo** (rooms from \$430; 1-8-1 Yurakucho, Chiyoda-ku; tokyo.peninsula.com), opened in 2007, is in Marunouchi, a business neighborhood bound to the west by the Imperial Palace grounds (directly across from the hotel) and to the east by Tokyo Station (the hub of Tokyo travel). We like the location because it's just a three-minute walk from Ginza, and it's also one of five hotels on our list that's in a stand-alone tower.

The first thing one notices when pulling into the hotel's private, circular entrance is the white-gloved staff—there is even an attendant whose sole job is to help guests into and out of the revolving door. To get to the check-in counter, guests have to walk through the restaurant, which feels counterintuitive, like crashing a dinner party. But beyond the bustling eating area, the hotel feels rather intimate, even though it has 267 guest rooms and 47 suites.

The unassuming hallways do not do justice to the rooms, which have soaring ceilings, sexy lighting, and burnt-orange carpeting that really pops. We love the glamorous dressing rooms. Most have seated vanities—and even nail dryers. “The rooms are excessively techie, even for Japan,” says one editor. Ours had 21 intuitive panels, each marked in English and Japanese. The more inventive buttons included: valet box delivery, outdoor temperature (in Fahrenheit and Celsius), wind speed, Internet radio, fax machine, and room humidity (dry and wet). Also, one big pro: The hotel has one of Tokyo's top concierge teams. Two little cons: You're not guaranteed a view (ours was disappointing), and rooms by the elevator can be a bit noisy.

Heading north, **Aman Tokyo** (rooms from \$625; 1-5-6 Otemachi, Chiyoda-ku; aman.com), the brand's first urban hotel, which opened in December 2014, is on floors 33 to 38 of the Otemachi Tower in Otemachi, a business hub that is more or less an extension of Marunouchi. Designwise, no hotel in Tokyo compares. This is the Big Wow. In the cavernous lobby, imposing black basalt walls lead up to a 98-foot-high ceiling made of white Japanese rice paper. The

atmosphere sets the stage for the calming ambience throughout the 52 guest rooms and 32 suites on four floors. Book out the room overlooking the Imperial Palace, even if that means opting for a standard room (which are unusually spacious at 764 square feet). We like the 16 Corner Suites, which, at 1,302 square feet each, have two walls of windows.

What distinguishes the Aman is its modern riff on traditional Japanese design. Rooms have *washi* screens. Pine-wood floors are accented with tatami rugs. Bathrooms have *onsen* buckets and *ofuro* tubs. It also ties in its heritage in subtle ways. There is a stunning infinity pool (fans know all Amans have them), and the street-level Café by Aman, serving French food, looks out over the 168 trees that were planted at the hotel's entrance—a nod to the nonurban settings in which so many Aman resorts exist.

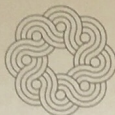
Still, the hotel doesn't please everyone. One contributing writer thought it was “very strange. All gray, stone, and dour. Impressive in terms of excess wasted space but a bummer too. The dining room is austere and empty and pretentious with truffles, caviar, and gold leaf scattered in a nonsensical way on everything.” Which, we'd argue, are also reasons to love the place.

The Aman was the city's newest high-end offering until Otemachi's **Hoshinoya Tokyo** (rooms from \$780; 1-9-1 Otemachi, Chiyoda-ku; hoshinoyatokyo.com) opened in July. Shrouded by a metal-latticed kimono-patterned exterior, Hoshinoya, a Japanese brand with five resorts, adds diversity to the hotel scene in that it's a luxury *ryokan*, which Tokyo is mostly without. It's in its own 17-story building with 84 rooms. There are guest lounges on every floor; the top floor actually has a hot spring.

Says one editor of the **Mandarin Oriental Tokyo** (rooms from \$580; 2-1-1 Nihonbashi Muromachi, Chuo-ku; mandarinoriental.com): “I've never experienced such attentive service, and that's saying a lot in Tokyo. They knew my name at the bar when I had interacted with no one while taking a seat.” The hotel is in the Nihonbashi financial center, south of Otemachi and north of Marunouchi and Ginza. Opened in 2005, it's on floors 30 to 38 of the Nihonbashi Mitsui Tower. It can be dated by its outlets—there aren't enough for today's plugged-in society.

The lobby is on the 38th floor. It sort of floats on either side. Behind the front desk, it's open and drops to 37, where many of the 12 restaurants are. (Three have Michelin ratings, making the Mandarin Oriental the most starred hotel in Tokyo.) On the opposite side is a staircase to 37. In general, the decor is glass, light wood, and white lantern-type lights. It feels masculine and modern.

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The hotel has 157 guest rooms and 22 suites. Even at capacity you'd never know it was full. The common spaces never feel crowded or noisy. The spacious Mandarin Grand Room, at 646 square feet, is our favorite. On the 34th floor, it has expansive views of Mount Fuji. The desk drawer full of artfully designed office-y things—stapler, paper clips, tape—is a nice touch.

Hibiya, a business district adjacent to Marunouchi and Ginza, has the first Western-style hotel in Japan: the 931-room **Imperial Hotel** (rooms from \$450; 1-1-1 Uchisaiwai-cho, Chiyoda-ku; imperialhotel.co.jp), which just celebrated its 125th anniversary. “I felt like I was in the Tokyo version of the Grand Budapest Hotel,” says one editor. The decor, which may be getting a refresh after the 2020 Olympics, is not why you book here. You stay at the Imperial for the service, which is Japanese to the *n*th degree. The aforementioned editor had a kimono-clad woman meet him on the *shinkansen* train platform from Kyoto; she all but held his hand on the way to the hotel's check-in desk. The Imperial also might have the top laundry service of any hotel in the world—and that's not hyperbole. The staff is rumored to know how to get out stains to perfection from the 100 or so saucers served at the hotel's 17 dining venues.

The Imperial has strong ties to Frank Lloyd Wright, who created an iteration of the hotel in 1923. The architect's namesake suite, reserved for dignitaries, is the only one in the world that is allowed to use his designs. Everything in the space is his—the bedroom writing desk, the teacups (the red circle on the rim hides a lipstick mark, genius!), the Hopi American Indian carpet (a look FLW liked). On the mezzanine, the Old Imperial Bar—not to be missed—has one of his frescoes.

Back in Marunouchi, location is the selling point for the neighborhood's other properties. The **Palace Hotel Tokyo** (rooms from \$700; 1-1-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku; palacehoteltokyo.com) is across from the Imperial Palace's East Gardens. Most rooms have balconies (a Tokyo rarity) overlooking the green expanse. The hotel, built more than 50 years ago, attracted mostly a business clientele until 2009, when it was transformed into a bona fide luxury property with a renovation. There is nothing particularly Japanese about the rooms, aside from the spotlessness. Each floor has different atmospheric music, which is subtle, but once you notice it you can't not hear it. Additionally, there are ten restaurants and bars. Of particular interest is the 25-seat Royal Bar. It's moody and old-school. The first chief bartender, starting in 1961, was Kiyoshi Imai, better known as Mr. Martini. He designed

some of the glassware and the bar itself. His Gordon's gin martini is still what to order. Many consider it to be the top martini in the city. The garnish makes it: an olive stuffed with pimiento.

On the east side of Tokyo Station, the **Shangri-La Hotel, Tokyo** (rooms from \$560; 1-8-3 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku; shangri-la.com) debuted in 2009. It's pretty similar to every Shangri-La in the world, down to the pumped-in scent. It occupies the top 11 floors of the 37-story Marunouchi Trust Tower Main and has a Chinese theme throughout, including on the menu of the Lobby Lounge (one of three dining options). The rooms, impeccable and comfortable, are designed by California-based Hirsch Bedner Associates. (Again, not very Japanese.) Guests on the 36th and 37th floors (37 rooms total) have access to the Horizon Club lounge, which provides services like in-room shopping, so overseas guests can browse for luxury watches at the Daimaru Tokyo department store without leaving the hotel.

Adjacent to Tokyo Station is **Four Seasons Tokyo at Marunouchi** (rooms from \$600; Pacific Century Place, 1-11-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku; fourseasons.com), which opened in 2002 with 48 guest rooms and nine suites on four floors in the 31-story Pacific Century Place Marunouchi building. The brand is set to open a second hotel, in Otemachi, in spring 2020 on the top six floors of a 39-story office tower.

Among the most historic of Tokyo hotels—of the city's buildings, actually—is the **Tokyo Station Hotel** (rooms from \$374; 1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda-ku; thetokyostationhotel.jp). Run by Japan's JR-East Hotels, it's worth knowing about because it's connected to Tokyo Station, so it's convenient for an early or late bullet train. It was built in 1915, in European architectural style, and withstood damage from the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 and U.S. air raids during World War II. It was meticulously restored in 2012 and looks brand new. In fact, some might think that's the problem with it: It didn't look Japanese in the first place, and now the outside looks a bit like a Disneyland take on a London building.

In Shinbashi, below Marunouchi and on the fringe of Ginza, is the **Conrad Tokyo** (rooms from \$490; 1-9-1 Higashi-Shinbashi, Minato-ku; conradhotels3.hilton.com), which seamlessly blends a business and leisure aesthetic. The hallways are long, with high ceilings and dark-brown wood walls, and the floors are lined with a pretty mint green carpet accented with brown trees and white cherry blossoms. The color scheme continues into the rooms, although the walls are lighter wood. Above the bed is a four-panel

artwork with more cherry blossoms and a little silver bird (which changes locations throughout the hotel rooms—some birds are flying, some are sitting on a branch). Book an Executive Level suite; they're on the top floor and have Executive Lounge privileges. Rooms have the requisite tech accents, but we enjoyed that the wake-up call is scheduled by dialing into an automated system. We also like that hotel chef Albert Tse has a partnership with All Nippon Airways business class. A tip: Befriend Azwin Ferdauz, the executive manager for service and quality. He will take care of you during your stay. (See "Our Man on the Ground," page 96.)

Now it's time to venture far northwest, to the **Park Hyatt Tokyo** (rooms from \$600; 3-7-1-2 Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku; tokyo.park.hyatt.com). It's part of a small spate of luxury hotels located in areas other than near the Imperial Palace. Celebrated in the movie *Lost in Translation* (see "How Sofia Coppola Got It Right," page 94), the hotel is probably Tokyo's most beloved—in Americans' imaginations, at least. It's on floors 39 to 52 of the Shinjuku Park Tower tower in Shinjuku, which has good shopping and a late-late-night scene.

The hotel opened in 1994, and we'd be lying if we said it doesn't feel its age. Guests come into the ground floor, a dark-brown area with modern sculptures, then travel up in the elevator. The noisy lobby with a glass pyramid top is on the 41st floor. The reception area has blue leather chairs and pink carpet.

Service is warm, welcoming, and top-notch, of course. But it's a twisty, complicated hotel. There are varying elevators depending on where you want to go. There's a cool diagram adjacent to the elevator bank that maps out the complex. There are four room types: standard, deluxe, view, and suite. Ours was a 645-square-foot standard Park View King. We thought the decor felt somewhat dusty with creams and muted colors.

On the 52nd floor, the New York Bar, made famous by the Coppola movie, is smaller than expected and, with nightly jazz, louder too. It is packed with tourists and

expats but does have great views. On the same floor and in keeping with the theme is the New York Grill steak house. Also, the pool is cool. It's on the 47th floor.

The Ritz-Carlton Tokyo and Grand Hyatt Tokyo are both in Roppongi, an area frequented by expats, which one editor thinks is "the perfect location to be dropped into Tokyo to get your bearings." It's close to a slew of good restaurants, bars, and shopping. For this reason, the modern, fine-art-filled **Grand Hyatt Tokyo** (rooms from \$720; 6-10-3 Roppongi, Minato-ku; tokyo.grand.hyatt.com) has earned a reputation for attracting a fashion crowd. Meanwhile, the **Ritz-Carlton Tokyo** (rooms from \$480; Tokyo Midtown, 9-7-1 Akasaka, Minato-ku; ritzcarlton.com) is located in Tokyo's second-tallest building, the Midtown Tower. Views are spectacular. The hotel was refreshed last year—the decor was updated so the color scheme is now light and dark gray and brown wood. Book on the 53rd-floor Club Level for entrée to the Club Lounge, a very peaceful oasis that serves breakfast, lunch, dinner, and snacks in between.

In Akasaka, between Roppongi and the Imperial Palace, the **Prince Gallery Tokyo Kioicho** (rooms from \$440; 1-2 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku; princehotels.com), part of the Luxury Collection, opened in July. There are two other stand-alone hotels to consider in this area. On the hill of Hie Shrine, the former Tokyo Hilton shuttered in 2006 and reopened under Japanese management as the **Capitol Hotel Tokyo** (rooms from \$510; 2-10-3 Nagatacho, Chiyoda-ku; capitolhoteltokyo.com) after a rebuild from the ground up. It's a tranquil home base, with 251 rooms and 13 suites. The 1,479-room **Hotel New Otani** (rooms from \$305; 4-1 Kioi-cho, Chiyoda-ku; newotani.co.jp), with a lot of black lacquer, florals, and velvets, has an outdoor pool on the grounds of its 400-year-old, ten-acre garden. And because these days it seems as if everything old is new again, it's worth mentioning that both the Capitol and New Otani were built as part of the hotel boom in advance of the Tokyo Olympics...in 1964. ●