

# MELDING CULTURE WITH MODERNITY

A palatial experience in the heart of Tokyo.

Words ANIS RAMLI



01  
View of Imperial Palace grounds and Tokyo skyline  
from the Club Lounge.

02  
The Palace opened in 2012 but dates back over half a  
century and was rebuilt from scratch.

03  
The lobby boasts of an airy contemporary design.



02

It has become quite a treat to welcome bedtime. Turndown often comes with little surprises such as his-and-hers pyjamas (hers can be a shirtdress or separates the next day), self-heating eye masks – and this being sakura season, sakura bath salts for a relaxing soak.

Beyond being just indulgent treats, bedtime rituals such as these perfectly round up the Palace Hotel Tokyo experience that leverages on its royal address and heritage roots to deliver a palatial encounter steeped in Japanese traditions. At every turn, there is a profound sense of grace and gentle spirit that provides a microcosm of the Japanese culture.

The DNA of Japanese royalty, for instance, is seamlessly infused into the Palace Hotel Tokyo – from the brick walls that mirror the palace moat to the sublime artworks referencing the trees in the Imperial Garden. Curated Japanese authentic and artisanal products services and accessories provide a further distinctive look into the local culture. There are the Nambu Tekki cast iron teapots that wait in the room alongside Jugetsudo teas by Maruyama Nori, whose leaves are picked near Mount Fuji. Nibbles come by way of dried figs from a sixth generation family business in Wakayama, known for its premium fruits since the Edo period.

These minute details amalgamate to deliver a strong Japanese cultural experience to the international customer and millennial base clamouring for insights into Japan's inimitable culture. More recently, the hotel has curated bespoke experiences for guests to capture the essence of Japan during their stay.



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On a shopping outing to Toyosu and the outer markets of Tsukiji, and exclusive collaboration with Tsukiji Information Center, guests are accompanied by a market aficionado to explain the intricate history of the markets and the sometimes complex traditions of cultural values and attitudes of the marketplace. Katsuhiro, our guide, was profoundly knowledgeable and seems to know everyone at both Toyosu and Tsukiji. At the former, we met 80-year-old Hiroyuki Ito, the second President of Minokei Co., a seafood wholesale distributor whose father founded the firm the same time as Tsukiji opened. He took our poking around his stall in good stride and when asked if he ever missed Tsukiji, he said, "You only have to look and move forward."

The real experience was at Tsukiji's outer markets, where Katsu (as he preferred to be called), introduced us to retailers, purveyors and connoisseurs that shared their wealth of knowledge on their respective products. We stopped by various stalls that sell essential staples for the Japanese kitchen, such as *konbu* (kelp), tea, *nori* (seaweed) and *katsuobushi* (dried bonito shavings), many of which have been operating for decades. It was great to see the amount of foot traffic remaining high despite the inner market's move to Toyosu last year. And thanks to the municipal's move to build the indoor Tsukiji Uogashi complex, housing 60 multi wholesale vendors, visitors are able to browse and shop for bentos, sushis, fruits and vegetables and enjoy them upstairs on the second floor.



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The most popular item to get when at Tsukiji is green tea!

05  
Seasonal produce on display along the market's alleys.

06  
Hiroyuki Ito at his stall in Toyosu.

07  
Mornings at Tsukiji.

08  
This artist works part-time at Tsukiji Uogashi.



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09  
Lobster at Palace's  
Teppanyaki GO restaurant.

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Breakfast at the terrace.

11.  
Alcove-styled chairs at the  
Grand Kitchen Terrace that  
overlook the moat of the  
Imperial Palace gardens.

12.  
Pastries at breakfast are  
inspired by the taste of Paris.





Other programmes by the hotel bring guests up close and personal with sumo wrestlers and Kabuki performance artists, leading them beyond the arena and the stage that includes an intimate lunch with the respective group. There is also an excursion to view the city's art and architecture while the etiquette programme, a studied consideration of the refined Japanese custom, is especially popular with business people.

Japanese flair and flavours that capture the essence of the season are infused throughout the hotel's 10 restaurants. At Teppanyaki restaurant, GO, Chef Masateru Horiuchi grinds his own flavoured salts in matcha and sakura blends complete with seared sakura leaves. High tea at the Palace Lounge is presented in bento boxes that pack sandwiches and scones served alongside *inarizushi* rice snacks and other traditional tea sweets made of rice and red beans. The theme of Japanese authenticity and quality echoed in the arcade shops where guests will find Nousakau, a brand founded 400 years ago prized for its various metal items, including design-store favourite, bendable tin items and Imabari Yokkin, the famed towel maker from Ehime prefecture, produced since 1894.







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13  
Evian SPA Reception.

14  
Park Suite Bathroom.

At Palace Hotel Tokyo, quality is central and it's the details that matter. While pride in Japan is uppermost, the hotel also curates the best from other markets to deliver a world class experience. There are connotations of luxury and exclusivity at every turn – with Imabari supplying the bath and the 300-threadcount bed linens. The French influence is clearly visible too, with Parisian brand Anne Semonin amenities and an invitation to experience the Evian Spa, Japan's first outpost of the French spa brand.

But even the Evian Spa experience has been tweaked to embed Japanese touches. The newly-introduced Bright Lift Drainage Facial, designed exclusively for the spa, uses the skincare brand Warew, famed for its Japan-grown botanical ingredients (cherry tree, magnolia, plum, to name a few). It begins with a relaxing scalp massage that segues to a rhythmic and delicious face massage that can

lull you to sleep. This uplifting facial is designed to alleviate dullness, but by the end of the treatment, it did more than just that. The skin felt rejuvenated, stimulated and mirrored back a healthy and taut complexion.

All these thoughtful touches have produced an inimitable oasis that is on par with Tokyo's most premium hotels. It has also landed the hotel a coveted mention in the Forbes Travel Guide list 2012, making it the first ever Japanese-branded and independently-owned hotel to be awarded Five Stars. With all that Palace Hotel Tokyo offers, it certainly punches above its weight by harnessing the intricacies and wealth of centuries old culture melded with modernity. 

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