

OPEN A LITTLE ADVENTURE

T TÔZAI LINE — 東西線

Tôzai

TWIST, POUR, KANPAI - THEN GO FURTHER.

*An insider guide to Tokyo & Kyoto
from Sake Samurai, Monica Samuels.*

START

TOKYO

KYOTO

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EXPERIENCE JAPAN // WITH MONICA

Komé Collective President & Sake Samurai

Japan is a must for anyone's bucketlist. I grew up visiting my grandparents every summer and travel there frequently for work. Check out my travel and sake suggestions!

- Japan is not just about sushi! You'll have some of the best food experiences in the world.
- Japan is one of the easiest places to visit with its world-class bullet trains, you can explore alot of the country quickly.
- There's so much regionality to Japan - with over 400 inhabited islands, the food and culture is so different across the country!
- Japanese sake and spirits are many centuries old and have a wide variety of flavor profiles and styles.

BEST TIMES TO VISIT

Between September through November or March through beginning of May - comfortable temperatures, but also the busiest periods of time!

TOKYO 東京

Japan's sprawling capital and one of the world's great food and drink cities. Tokyo is a crossroads for sake from across the country, offering a genuine range from purpose-built tasting rooms to award-winning sake izakaya and standing bars made for a quick, casual pour. The city offers an approachable way to explore the breadth of modern sake culture

EUREKA!

Nishiazabu (Minato) | Sake bar, reservation recommended

Run by Marie Chiba — a Sake Samurai and author of the book *Sake Pairing* — Eureka! has built over a decade of direct brewery relationships, which shows in genuinely hard-to-find pours (an “Invisible Pink Unicorn” kijoshu from Aramasa among them). There's no fixed menu: Chiba tailors both the sake and the food to whoever's at the counter, so no two visits look quite the same. Small, 13-seat J-shaped counter, plus private rooms for up to five. Closed Mondays.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: No confirmed English menu turned up in research, but the bar has a real international following — write-ups mention guests from across Europe, the Middle East, and the U.S. on any given night — and staff are known for happily talking guests through the sake. Reserve by phone (+81-3-6805-0760) or TableCheck.

4-11-28 Nishiazabu, 2F, Minato City, Tokyo

HEIWA DOBUROKU KABUTOCHO 平和どぶろく兜町醸造所

Kabutocho (Nihonbashi, Chuo) | Working brewery + bar

A working doburoku brewery and bar from a well-regarded Wakayama sake house with close to a century of brewing behind it. Doburoku is unfiltered, unpasteurized sake, and this is one of the few places in Tokyo actually brewing it on-site rather than just pouring it — seasonal batches rotate through unexpected flavors (basil, lychee, blueberry, sansho pepper), alongside the brewery's bottled Wakayama sake, sparkling sake, and yuzu liqueur. Small and modern: 15 counter seats, 15 standing. Card or QR pay only, no cash.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Tabelog's English booking page makes reservations straightforward for non-Japanese speakers; in-person English support wasn't confirmed in research, but it's a casual, counter-based taste-and-pour format that's easy to navigate either way. Reserve online the day before (1–5pm), or walk in before 5pm.

1 min. walk from Kayabacho Station Exit 11, Chuo City, Tokyo

SAKE HIDEJIRO 酒 秀次郎

Ebisu / Daikanyama | Sake-specialty izakaya

One of the country's award-winning sake izakaya (Japan Restaurant Award Best 100, both 2022 and 2025), built by an owner who designed the entire food menu around what pairs best with sake, rather than the other way around. Reservations are genuinely hard to get — worth booking well ahead.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Has its own English-language site (hidejiro.com/en) for browsing and booking. In-person service still leans Japanese, so lean on the site to set expectations before arriving.

2-10-8 Ebisunishi, Ebisu Daikan East 1F, Shibuya, Tokyo

PREMIUM SAKE PUB GASHUE

Ueno (Taito) | Sake pub, budget-friendly

Opened in 2019 with the explicit mission of being “a sake pub foreigners can enjoy casually.” Consistently ranked #2 of 3,400+ Taito restaurants on Tripadvisor (314 reviews, 5.0 average). A certified kikizake-shi (sake sommelier) selected the 50+ by-the-glass labels, starting around ¥550 a pour, and staff walk guests through guided tastings dish by dish.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Purpose-built and staffed for English speakers — reviewers repeatedly call out a staff member by name (Kako) for excellent English sake explanations. The easiest, most reassuring first stop on this list for a sake newcomer.

2-13-5 Higashiueno, Kowa Dai-2 Bldg 1F, Taito City, Tokyo

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WASAKE SAKE EXPERIENCE

Asakusa | Tasting room / shop

Opened November 2024 specifically for inbound visitors, under the concept "Sake x Inbound x Experience." Coin-operated self-serve tasting stations (¥600–9,700 in tokens) cover 50+ brands from classic labels to rarities — sparkling, aged koshu, kijoshu, nigori. A staffed premium counter offers guided pours on the rarer bottles, and anything tasted can be bought by the bottle, duty-free included.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Built for international guests from the ground up: English- and Chinese-speaking staff, and a bookable ~120-minute guided English tasting (up to 10 sakes) via Pelago/MAIKOYA.

1-11-1 Asakusa, The Asakusa Residence 101, Taito City, Tokyo

JINOMONO BAR MUJO 地のもののバル MUJO

Shibuya (Yoyogi-Hachiman) | Omakase-style sake bar

A small, counter-only sake bar run by owner Tatsuki Ohara, previously of the well-regarded Tokyo sake retailer Isehon-ten. Rare, carefully chosen sake paired with dishes built from regional ingredients — Ohara talks guests through the story behind each bottle and is happy to guide anyone who doesn't yet know their own preferences.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: The owner's English is specifically called out as excellent in reviews, and it's explicitly recommended for international guests. Known for a warm, social vibe where the owner introduces guests to each other.

1-3-14 Tomigaya, Shibuya, Tokyo

SAKE-BAR TABLE TSUKI

Tsukiji | Hotel sake bar, open to the public

A sake bar inside the boutique TSUKI Tokyo hotel, open to non-guests. A large communal table seats about ten, with a rotating selection of 6–8 regional sakes.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: English tasting notes cover water, rice, koji, and brewer for each pour, plus hotel-standard service — a straightforward, informative stop if the goal is learning rather than deep-diving into rarities.

1-9-4 Tsukiji, TSUKI Hotel 1F, Chuo City, Tokyo

SAKE TO SAKANA BASE 酒と魚 BASE

Shinjuku | Sake-and-seafood izakaya

Run by Kentaro Shimada, formerly of the respected "Moto" sake-bar group, near Shinjuku's west exit. About 30 sake labels in rotation alongside seasonal fish dishes, with weekend daytime drinking available.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Has its own dedicated English-language site (shinjuku-base.com/en) for menu and reservations.

7-5-5 Nishishinjuku, Plaza Nishi-Shinjuku 202, Shinjuku City, Tokyo

SAKE MARKET SHINJUKU

Shinjuku | Self-serve tasting bar

Run by KURAND, right by Shinjuku-sanchome Station. 150+ bottles across sake, fruit wine, umeshu, and shochu on a self-pour, time-unlimited, flat-rate basis — bring your own food or order delivery. A sister branch operates in Akihabara.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Explicitly markets itself to English speakers and draws a notably international, sake-curious crowd — a low-pressure way to sample broadly without needing label knowledge going in.

3-9-9 Shinjuku, Shinjuku Watasei Tama Bldg 6F, Shinjuku City, Tokyo

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DOZOSAKE 金多屋

Hachioji | Sake bar in a century-old machiya

Occupies the evening hours of Machiya Cafe Kanetaya, a building that started as an actual sake shop in 1912. A carefully — if not enormously — curated sake list, alongside gentle, health-conscious small dishes.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Run by David and Miwa, an American couple who relocated from San Francisco specifically to pursue sake; David's English fluency and the couple's evident warmth are as much a draw for regulars as the sake itself.

1-11 Yokoyamacho, Hachioji, Tokyo

MEDETASHI めでたし

Meguro (Ikejiri-Ohashi) | Sake-pairing restaurant

Connected to a brewery that reached 100% junmai and 100% pesticide-free rice sourcing years ago, and that philosophy runs through the kitchen. Eight rotating seasonal courses pair dish-by-dish with sake — or a composed non-alcoholic pairing — with a choice of all-sake, all-non-alcoholic, or half-and-half. Reservation required.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Full English-language website, menu, and reservation system (TableCheck) — clearly built with international guests in mind from day one.

2-16-26 Ohashi, CRIMSON ONE 5F, Meguro City, Tokyo

TAKASAKI NO OKAN 高崎のおかん

Meguro (Naka-Meguro / Aobadai) | Sake-and-food pairing restaurant

Led by owner-chef Jyo Takasaki around the idea of “bringing heat to ingredients, sake, and people.” Every pour is warmed to a precisely chosen temperature (kanzake) and matched course-by-course to naturally grown, closely sourced ingredients.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Well documented in English for international visitors via OMAKASE and Corner.inc listings, including reservations — a good pick for travelers specifically curious about kanzake and temperature-driven sake pairing.

3-10-11 Aobadai, Aobadai Flats 101, Meguro City, Tokyo

MUSSHU MIZUKI, GINZA 夢酒みずき 銀座

Ginza (Chuo) | Craft-sake specialty izakaya

The manager comes from a sake brewery family and has curated 40+ types of craft sake from small kura across Japan. The chef-and-sommelier pairing course — matching seasonal dishes to specific sake selections — is the reason to come. Roughly ¥5,000–6,000 for dinner and drinks.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: English menu available, and specifically recommended in English-language guides (Sakura Mobile, bento.com, Truly Tokyo) for sake exploration.

6-7-6 Ginza, La Paix Bldg B1F, Chuo City, Tokyo

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TOYOSU FISH MARKET: Replaced the famous Tsukiji market in late 2018.

TURRET COFFEE: A fantastic coffee shop in Tokyo in the Tsukiji outer market, “the best outrageous coffee shop in Japan”.

RAMEN STREET IN TOKYO STATION: Tokyo Station’s Ramen street features a rotating assortment of Tokyo’s best ramen shops. Order your ramen, gyoza, and draft beer from a vending machine, get in line, and when you get to the front of the line your order will be ready with a counter seat to eat.

KAPPABASHI KITCHEN TOWN: This is the restaurant supply district that everyone can shop in. The two best knife shops in Tokyo, Kamata & Kamaasa, are both here, along with other shops for beautiful chopsticks, ceramic dishes, tin sake cups, Japanese barware,



SOBADOKORO YAMATO: A very traditional, simple and delicious soba spot if you are looking for a bite in this area.

SAKURAI TEA TASTING IN AOYAMA: Monica’s favorite tea experience, maybe even in all of Japan. Open from 11am.

BAR GEN YAMAMOTO: Gen-san is a legend, a lovely guy, and accepts reservations in English.

MEIJI SHRINE: Tokyo’s most famous Shinto shrine, it’s refreshingly non-touristy, and a great place to spend an hour walking and exploring the grounds. Make an offering by writing a wish on a paper to tie to the prayer wall, catch a wedding procession, observe the sake casks and wine barrels given as offerings by famous producers in Japan and Europe, or check out the iris garden.

Near Meiji shrine is **TAKESHITA-DORI** and **OMOTESANDO HILLS**, both great shopping and photo-taking areas for different reasons. Takeshita-dori is famous for the Harajuku style: young, edgy, trendy, while Omotesando hills and the area around it are known for world-renowned architecture of shops featuring the most iconic brands.

GOLDEN GAI: Japan’s answer to a “red light district,” this is a rowdy alley filled with tiny bars and restaurants.

SUMO TOURNAMENTS: Held in the months of January, March, May, July, September, and November. Historically this form of martial arts was used as an entertainment experience for the Shinto gods. In modern day, sumo tournaments retain many of their traditional rituals. It’s a completely different experience to view sumo from the premium masu seats, which I highly recommend splurging on if this is a bucket list experience.



KYOTO 京都

The birthplace of sake, and where Tozai is brewed. It was once the capital of Japan from 794-1868 and is still thought of as the “heart” of Japan. Being the third largest city, Kyoto is the home to countless cultural landmarks, historical sites, and currently has more than 30 active sake breweries.

MY SAKE WORLD KAWARAMACHI

Shimogyo-ku (Kawaramachi) | Sake tasting & blending experience

Run by Leaf Publications, the team behind the Sake World media site. Guests taste through 12 Japanese sake varieties, then blend their own personal bottle using laboratory beakers and graduated cylinders, walking out with a one-of-a-kind “My Sake” no one else has. Housed in a renovated Kyoto machiya, with staff first walking guests through sake history and basics before the hands-on blending. Originally opened at a separate Oike address in late 2024 before consolidating into this Kawaramachi location — worth confirming current booking details before visiting.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Multilingual service in Japanese, English, and Chinese, with pricing tiers by guidance level — roughly ¥5,900 with Japanese guidance, ¥7,500 with English.

711 Uematsucho, Teramachi-dori Matsubara-sagaru, Shimogyo-ku, Kyoto

SAKE HALL MASUYA サケホール益や

Shijo Karasuma (Nakagyo) | Sake brasserie

The more refined sister concept to the casual Masuya Saketen bistro, four minutes from Karasuma Station. Carefully selected, high-freshness sake poured in approachable half-go (90ml) glasses, so tasting widely is easy whether standing for a quick drink or settling in for a full meal. Standout dishes built to complement the sake program include a yuba-tofu pizza with blue cheese, karaage, and pufferfish (fugu) sashimi.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Repeatedly and enthusiastically praised by international visitors for how welcoming staff are to non-Japanese speakers — English menus are standard, and a bartender named Sho is called out often in reviews for walking guests through tastings with real warmth rather than a script.

298-2 Ichirenschacho, Takoyakushi-dori Karasuma-Higashi-iru, Nakagyo Ward, Kyoto

SIZUK サケノシズク

Shimogyo (near Kyoto Station) | Sake & shochu specialty shop, standing bar

Five minutes from Kyoto Station's Karasuma exit, run by owner Kazuma Sasaki, who travels to breweries himself to select every label. Focused on “kokushu” — the umbrella term covering sake, honkaku shochu, awamori, and hon-mirin — with around 11 breweries' worth of genuinely unusual labels in the fridges, Fukuoka's LIBROM (moromi infused with lemon verbena) among them. A curved counter on a gently sloped floor gives it more of a gallery feel than a typical shop. Open long hours (11am–8pm weekdays, until midnight Fri/Sat), closed Mondays.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Specifically popular with foreign tourists per multiple sources — the tasting-by-glass, browse-the-fridge format is easy to navigate visually regardless of language, and it draws a notably young, international crowd.

162 Nishisakaicho, Shimogyo Ward, Kyoto

SAKE & BEER BAR WINDMILL

Higashiyama | Sake & craft beer bar

A hidden gem tucked along the walk between Sanjusangendo Temple and Kiyomizu-dera, built around a nostalgic British/classic-rock theme — 60s and 70s records playing rather than typical bar background music. Staff match sake and craft beer to whatever a guest is in the mood for rather than working off a fixed list. Rated 4.9/5 on Tripadvisor.

WITHOUT JAPANESE: Extensively reviewed in English on Tripadvisor with consistently high praise — a genuinely welcoming stop for international visitors given its spot between two major temple sites.

414-2 Kaneicho, Higashiyama Ward, Kyoto

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KARAOKE BARS: Big Echo is a karaoke chain that you can find throughout Japan - easy to navigate in English, well priced, and great song selections. In Japan the trains do not run all night long, so if you've been out eating and drinking so late that you've missed the last train, it's common to just pop into one of these and sing your heart out until the trains start running at 5am.

KIYOMIZU TEMPLE: Walk around Higashiyama on your way to Kiyomizu temple and eat all the street food.

ARASHIYAMA: A great area, the famous bamboo grove and free-roaming monkey park are there, as well as a broad selection of restaurants. It's really lovely in the spring and fall.

NIJO CASTLE: Built in 1603 as the Kyoto residence of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the first shogun of the Edo Period (1603-1867).

KINKAKUJI: The retirement villa of shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, this is a zen temple where the top two floors are completely covered in gold leaf to echo the extravagant Kitayama culture that developed in the wealthy aristocratic circles of Kyoto during Yoshimitsu's times.

KYOTO TOWER: The tallest structure in Kyoto with an observation deck overlooking the city.

DAIGOJI TEMPLE: The most important temple in the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism.

FUSHIMI INARI TAISHA: The Shinto Shrines or places of worship that hold sacred objects from the "kami" (shinto gods).

NISHIKI MARKET: An essential food tour and great for sampling local cuisine without committing to a full meal.

KURAMA ONSEN: A resort and spa with an amazing (and relaxing) hot spring.

