

Japan March 29- April 7

Sakura Season

Thursday, March 29th: Flight out of JFK-Tokyo Narita airport

Friday March 30th: Check in to Hotel Niwa

Dinner: Yakitori (at Shinjuku in omoide yokochō)- this area is fantastic. Right off the main area of Shinjuku there are tons of TINY little yakitori places. They seat like 8 people- all of them are great. I suggest trying each one.

Night time: golden gai area in Shinjuku- any bar that doesn't charge a fee.

Saturday March 31st:

Breakfast: Tsukiji fish market at 8 am - toro, Omakase, get everything here! Monado opens at 10 am had the BEST toro

- Daytime: Shopping around ginza area after the fish market (about a 15 min walk from here so it's good to do Ginza area after fish market)- kinuraya for sweets.

Lunch: Jingumae (Ramen in Harajuku)- This ramen place is right next to Gyoza-ra in Harajuku area, we went here because the line was too long at Gyoza-ra. It's a solid ramen spot.

Dinner: Ginza Kyubey (sushi)- 16 course Omakase. This place is incredible, they do pretty innovative sushi yet clean. We ate a live shrimp that was literally still hopping up in the air before the chef cut it up. Definitely have to come for the experience. The chef is so cute and sweet- he gave us a cut out of a newspaper article he was in as his "business card"

Night time: Bar Orchid- This bar in Ginza is located in a large building. Super dark cute speakeasy type place. You pick a fruit and they make a drink based off of it. You choose the strength of your drink- light, medium, strong. I chose a kiwi with tequila and it comes out in an extravagant cup (or my instance a box). MUST try! Very expensive though, about \$30 a drink.

Sunday, April 1st:

Breakfast: Gyoza-ro 餃子口ウ (in Omotesando/ Harajuku area) - favourite gyoza place, they just have 2 types of gyoza (fried and boiled), 3 types of appetisers (get all), rice and soup. I just order the whole menu + beer, great food and cheap. It's

open til late but expect to queue at least 45 minutes. We got there at 10:45 before opening and got right in so I suggest doing this.

- Daytime: Shopping around Omotesando- Kiddy Land. Went to the cat cafe (coorikuya)- this is definitely an experience you must do in Tokyo. They are super clean and like 3 stories. You pay \$10 to play with a bunch of adorable cats. They give you a little treat to give them and you enter the space with all the cats and are free to play with them for however long. Then walk to Shibuya- go to Shibuya crossing. It is the busiest in the world. Very similar to times square.

Lunch: This was not a good day for lunch, we got caught up shopping and ended up at some random Lobster Ramen place near our hotel. Was not good.

Dinner: We did the Robot show this night and after got more yakitori in omoide yokocho (it's about a 5 min walk).

Nightlife: Robot Restaurant 19:50 (have to show up 30 min early). The robot show is a must in Tokyo. Its an hour and a half show of the most bizarre robot fighting show. You sit in bleachers and enjoy the show.

Monday, April 2nd:

Breakfast: Pastries from local shop near our hotel

- Morning: rented row boats on the river Kitanomarukoen in Chiyoda- this was about a 10 minute walk from our hotel so it was very convenient. This was one of my favorite activities. We got a rowboat for an hour on the river and got to see all the Sakura that blooms all along the river. Absolutely breathtaking- highly recommend coming here during Sakura season and getting row boats.

Lunch: Afuri (Ramen in Harajuku)- This was okay, not the best. It is a chain in Tokyo and we came because we saw it on Foddie Magicians Instagram. You order your style of broth and how you want your Ramen at the machine and pay beforehand then wait in line.

- Daytime: Hung out in Yoyogi park. Get treats and beer from 7/11 and Harajuku area and chill.

Dinner: Kanda (Kaiseki in Minato)- this is a 3 michelin star Kaiseki, we got 12 courses. There are no written menus, you get whatever based on ingredients of the year. This was FANTASTIC. Made a reservation through pocket concierge.

Nightlife: Rooftop bar at the Park Hyatt Hotel.. You must go here when you are in Tokyo, they have live Jazz every night and the views are breathtaking. Be warned- there is a \$50 cover so it is definitely a one time thing but very worth it.

Tuesday, April 3rd:

Breakfast: Midori Sushi (ginza) – This was one of my FAVORITE meals in Tokyo. It is super simple and hole-in the wall place where all the locals go and it is the best sushi. You can order a -la-carte to get exactly what you want. It opens at 11am and we got there at 10:45 and had to wait an hour. Expect a wait, but this is an absolute must if you like sushi.

- Daytime: Senso-Ji Temple,

Lunch: Snack at all the food stands around Senso-Ji. We had that matcha ice cream in a donut- SO good- highly suggest.

Dinner: Maisen(tonkatsu in harajuku)- Fried pork. This place was actually incredible. You get an entire flank of fried pork along with a bowl of rice and tempura.

Wednesday, April 4th: Kyoto

Breakfast: Tsukiji fish market for fresh tuna - disappointing because the inner market is closed on Wednesday.

- Train to Kyoto- book this in advance so you can get a seat. It's only about a 2.5 hour ride- it's great.

Lunch: Arashiyama Yoshimura (soba)- This place is a must in Kyoto. You have 4 options, I got the cold and hot soba with tempura. You dip the cold soba in the sauce they give you on the side. This place is incredible and has sweeping views of the river right outside of the Arashiyama Bamboo Forest.

- Arashiyama Bamboo Forest and walk all around the Gion area (where Geisha's are from)
- Nishiki market- Great food market to walk through for snacks pre-dinner.

Dinner: Hiro Bbq- Japanese style Korean BBQ where you cook your own meat. This place was amazing, Set menu included salad, egg pudding with waygu, waygu sushi, waygu tartare, tail broth soup, traditional waygu on the grill in the middle of our table, bibimbap, and dessert. It was a very good amount of food, we left stuffed, quality was amazing. You are really left to your own devices here so make sure you know how to cook your own meat!

Nightlife: Walk all along Kiya-machi Dori. This street is wonderful there are hundreds of little bars that face the river- absolutely stunning. We found a random little jazz bar that was so cute- highly recommend walking along here and stopping in any of the bars!

Thursday, April 5th:

Breakfast: At our Inn in Gion

- Daytime: We tried to fit EVERYTHING into one day. Started at the Fushimi Inari Taisha- this was incredible. There are also great street food vendors surrounding. Then went to the golden pavilion temple. Be warned- everything is super spread out here like 45 minutes by public transport apart.

Train to Osaka

Lunch: - Kuromon Ichiban Market this is a MASSIVE food market in Osaka, This place is like an alley about 4-5 blocks long, with tons of street food. We spent about 2 hours here going from stall to stall trying different foods for lunch. It was a lot

of fun. They have tons of fresh seafood. Takoyaki wanaka is very popular (fried octopus balls) but was a little too heavy for my taste. They have stalls with open fridges of raw wagyu beef. You choose your piece and they cook it in front of you. Everything is pretty reasonably priced. However, they do have stalls with exotic fruits

which are extremely expensive (\$20-100 for a vine of grapes, \$20 for one peach, etc. Strawberries were out of season when I was there but I hear they are life changing. Muscat grapes are very popular; they are the best you will ever have).

Dinner: Dotonbori Imai Honten (udon in Dotonbori area) -this was one we found on a bunch of websites and was highly reviewed. The udon was great and super cheap. It is located on the main road where there are hundreds of places so you truly can't go wrong here.

Nightlife: Dotonbori area- i have never seen so many restaurants and street food carts. Literally endless- one after the other, and bars all along the river. Just walk around here and pop into any place.

Friday, April 6th :

Leave Osaka and Head back to Tokyo on train- it's about 4 hours

Lunch- Seamon (Omakase in Ginza)- This Omakase was a fantastic place for lunch. The omakase option is almost half the price for lunch- \$60. Super fresh and simple Omakase. Highly recommend. It is located on the 6th floor of what looks like an office building.

Daytime: Explored the Maid Cafe @home. Maid cafes are such a weird concept it's almost hard to wrap your head around. The servers dress up in little maid outfits and cheer you on while you order. It's a fetish thing that is widely accepted in Tokyo. There are TONS of these and this place is literally 7 floors. The food and drinks are disgusting, you only go for the experience. Still not sure how I feel about it, definitely something you can only experience in Tokyo.

Dinner- Shima Steak - This is a MUST. One of my favorite meals in Tokyo. The steak is unbelievable. The chef brings beef from his farm in Kyoto. I highly recommend sitting at the bar so you can see them cooking, it's such a great experience. You obviously must get the Filet. Get all the appetizers and obviously the sandwich in a bento at the end of the meal. Be sure to ask for the sandwich. We had a gom reservation and were the last people in the restaurant. We had to ask for the sandwich (be warned it's about \$70). I recommend eating it right away, some people say wait till the next day on your flight but then it's cold and soggy bread.

Saturday, 7th:April 7th:

Flight from Narita to JFK

Lunch: Ichiran ramen- A must try ramen spot. You order our ramen at the machine and then eat in your own little box. There is no human interaction here which is FANTASTIC. These little booths have curtains and your ramen just appears. You have your own water spout and you can hit a button to get extra noodles. This was my favorite ramen in Japan by far.

Areas to explore

Shibuya - Worth exploring this whole area. Lots of places to eat, shop, 'game centers'(a.k.a arcades) where you can play games and also take '[purikura](#)' photo booths. The main [Shibuya crossing](#) is one of the busiest intersections in the world especially on the weekend. There's also the famous statue called [Hachiko](#) right outside the station which is one of the main meeting points in Shibuya. If you want to go shopping then check out 109 (pronounced 'ichi maru kyuu') department store, which has 109 stores inside! You can find clothes, hello kitty stuff, and more!

Walk up and down Meiji Dori street, you can just roam around that area, and go left, right, etc. and you will see a lot of small shops... Also, the area around the Times Square looking area has countless shops. A good central point of reference would be the jack spade store, address: Japan, 〒150-0041 Tokyo, Shibuya, Jinnan, 1 Chome-17-9, [河合ビル103](#). Put it into google maps and just start walking.

Harajuku - I'm going to break this down into two main areas, but it's one stop on the JR line from Shibuya or you can easily walk there from Shibuya. This is one of the fashion hubs of Tokyo, the inspiration of Gwen Stefani's harajuku girls and where you can wear practically anything and not feel out of place! Harajuku is the area you think of when you think about the crazy fashion- the big cotton candy, the rainbow noodles, cat cafes etc.

- [Meiji Jingu Shrine](#) – famous Shinto shrine right next to Harajuku station
- **Harajuku station**/[Takeshita dori](#) - go down takeshita dori and you'll find lots of crepe shops, cheap clothing, jewelry and such.

Omotesando – perpendicular to takeshita dori (turn right when you get out of Harajuku station). The further away from Harajuku station you go towards Aoyama dori, the more posh and expensive it gets. Omotesando was probably one of my favorite areas. We came back here multiple times. It is super clean and quiet and just overall so nice.

- Places to shop: In the Omotesando area go to all the shops for clothes and then Oriental Bazaar (souvenir shop), Kiddy Land (for toys and Japanese anime/characters)

Yoyogi Park - one of my favourite parks in Tokyo, go buy a tarp from 7/11 and have a picnic in the park. ALL of the Japanese people do it- they get CRAZY. There are literally groups of 20-30 people on these massive tarps with kegs and full on barbecues. We saw someone puking at 1:30pm on a Monday (Japanese get the first Monday of every month off) so be sure to go!

Shinjuku (east) - this is another bustling area of Tokyo famous for the going out and eating out drinking scene of Japan. Lots of cheap places, expect to see lots of drunk Japanese people on a Friday or Saturday night!

Kabukicho - the so-called 'red light district' of Japan

- Golden gai - a small area packed with tons of small, artsy bars that features lots of people from the entertainment business. A lot of places charge cover to get in, but then you can befriend the people in the bar and drink all night (note that Sundays are pretty dead). Or you can bar hop and check out all the different places in the area.
- Shinjuku gyoen - beautiful park to go for a stroll during the day

Hibiya/Ginza/Marunouchi - this area is known for its department stores, delicious restaurants, and close proximity to Tsukiji fish market. This was one of my favorite areas of Tokyo. On Saturday they close off the street to cars so you can walk on the streets- they have tables out in the big strip between all the shops so grab some beer and people watch!

- Lots of famous department stores (Mitsukoshi, Matsuya etc.) - at any of these go to the basement levels and you'll find an amazing selection of food, produce, treats, bread, booze, and other edible gifts to take home.

Tsukiji fish market - legendary fish market, the biggest in the world and always a place for foreigners to go check out. If you want to see the famous tuna auction that all of the famous sushi chefs get their ingredients from, you have to go at like 4:30am. We didn't do this, we came at 8am and it was perfect because it wasn't too crowded yet. There is an inside area and outer market. The inner market doesn't

open until 10am. We strolled around from 8-10am eating fresh sushi and it is absolutely WONDERFUL. You MUST go to Monado, this is a tuna stand on the inner market that opens at 10am. They have 4 variations of the tuna and you get it take-away in this plastic box. This was one of the best sushi pieces I had in all of Tokyo. It was absolutely mouth watering. I wish I could go back and have 500 pieces, dreaming about it everyday.

[Akihabara](#) - This area of Tokyo is where all the electronics' stores of Tokyo are, where you'll find lots of gadgets and techy geeky stuff

- [Asakusa](#) - the tallest building, '[Tokyo Sky Tree](#)' stands here as well as the famous Japanese temple called **Sensoji** with it's famous '[kaminarimon](#)' lantern at the entrance. This is where I took a picture similar to Kourtney Kardashian and got trolled by a random teen. The temples are beautiful and the little markets/ stands have AMAZING sweets. I love this area. They have great matcha ice cream and this one that comes in a bun- it's a must try sweet. If you want to buy a traditional souvenirs, you can find lots at 'Nakamise', which is the walkway between kaminarimon to the main temple.

Roppongi – this was once a popular area for foreigners, now other areas like Ginza have taken over but there are still places to see and shop like [Roppongi Hills](#) and [Midtown](#). We went there only briefly before our flight and nothing was open yet, it didn't seem to have as much or wasn't as exciting as all the other areas.

Types of food to eat:

- Sushi- Omakase
- yakitori (chicken skewers) - [Yurakucho area](#) near Hibiya is famous for this
- gyudon (beef on rice, sorta like bulgogi - Matsuya is a cheap eat and so good, you'll find them everywhere in the city)
- soba noodles
- Udon
- yakiniku (Japanified-korean bbq)
- ramen
- teppanyaki (Japanese steak house)
- Tonkatsu- Fried pork

Places that were recommended to us but we did not go:

- Gonpachi (The famous kill bill fight scene was based on this restaurant. yakitori - generally amazing food, and also a great experience - A MUST)
- Yakiniku Jumbo - (http://www.kuroge-wagyu.com/js/top_e.html)
- Ume no hana – famous kyoto food Tofu place (one of my favourite spots in Tokyo!) http://www.umenohana.co.jp/n_english/shoplist01.html
- Yasaiya mei (roppongi hills, and omotesando hills)-japanese food
- Toriyoshi(omotesando)-chicken wings. Yakitori
- Rigoletto (ropp hills)-spanish italian bar grill
- R2 (roppongi)-bar, near clubs
- Osteria(roppongi)-oysters, bar
- Sushizanmai(roppongi, shibuya,tsukiji etc) -sushi chain
- Ishii (akasaka)-sushi (counter seats are better, more formal but not too pricey, can have good Japanese sake)
- Harajuku Gyozarou (harajuku)-dumplings(no reservation, about30-1hrline at lunch time - try and go at off peak times because there's most likely always a queue.
- Bird land(ginza) yakitori, raw chicken
- Torigin (Ginza) yakitori
- Teppei (Hibiya/Yurakucho/Ginza) another delicious yakitori place
- Rin (shibuya) ramen
- Ippudo (ebisu etc) ramen chain
- Kyo hayashiya(omotesando, roppongi) green tea and sweets
- Ouca(ebisu) japanese ice cream
- Kushinobo(roppongi hills)
- Di punto (italian style tapas)
- Zauo shinjuku at Washington hotel (fishing restaurant!!! You fish for your own food then they prepare it fresh)
- Robot restaurant in shinjuku.
- Kanda Michelin Star restaurant.
- Lotus – cheesecakes!
- Matsubara-an, Omote Sando
(https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Restaurant_Review-g1066456-d3818339-Reviews-Kamakura_Matsubara_an_Keyaki-Shibuya_Tokyo_Tokyo_Prefecture_Kanto.html): Soba noodles restaurant
- A rice only restaurant that is supposedly very popular right now.
<http://www.akomeya.jp/>

CAFES

Property of Bella B. Clark

<https://www.bellabclark.com/>

<https://www.instagram.com/bellabclark/>

- Satei Hato - really traditional old cafe with traditional coffees and milk teas. Beautiful unique decor to this type of cafe in Japan.
- Cafe Kitsune
- Coffe Cabin 雜珈屋 (Zakkaya) - A really old and traditional coffee shop. (<http://tabelog.com/en/tokyo/A1317/A131702/13136172/>)

SHOPS

- **Oriental Bazaar** - for a one stop Japanese souvenir shopping, go here! You'll find anything from tea cups to kimonos to samurai swords. They're used to foreigners that they'll speak English too. <http://www.orientalbazaar.co.jp/en/about/index.html>
- **Gotokuji** (Cat Temple) - <https://www.tofugu.com/travel/gotokuji-temple/>
- *Japanese stationary:*
- **Hello Kitty store** - there is one inside Tokyo Station <https://shop.sanrio.co.jp/>
- **Kiddy Land** (Japanese character/anime store) - in Omotesando next to Oriental Bazaar <https://www.kiddyland.co.jp/en/stores.html>

Overall Notes:

- Get a JR railway pass before you go. Especially if you plan on travelling to Kyoto or Osaka or exploring outside of Tokyo. You can also use the JR pass on a lot of the subways.
- Subways are super easy and impeccably timely
- No one warned us that everything is very spread out in Tokyo. Expect at least a 30 min subway to a lot of the different big areas. We averaged about 10 miles walking a day as well- bring comfortable shoes.
- Get a pocket wifi from the airport. It is really worth it when exploring the city, you will need google maps. Get unlimited data.
- Taxis are insanely expensive, try to avoid them. Average trips are \$30+
- People are incredibly nice here, they may not speak english that well but they will always point you in the right direction
- It is common to drink beer at 8am with your sushi breakfast- enjoy it
- Reservations are very hard to get. Your hotel concierge must make them or a 3rd party like pocket concierge. Otherwise, just do walk in places.