

WISH YOU WERE HERE



Photographs: Martin Bureau, Kazuhiro Nogi/Getty Images

Reflections on the amazing

Japan's compelling capital has always seemed like a blend of futuristic and ancient, as **Laura Millar** discovers on a visit to Tokyo

I'm half stumbling, half crawling, across a floor which seems to be composed entirely of beanbags; occasionally I fall over and am cocooned, momentarily, in their comfortable embrace, before struggling to get up again, determined to make it to the other side of the room. When I do, it's to encounter a pathway which heads upwards at an angle, which I duly climb before entering another chamber through a velvet curtain. This is glazed entirely in mirrored glass, and strewn throughout with hundreds of floor-to-ceiling rows of different coloured LED lights, making it feel as if I'm in a cross between a giant glitterball, and the control deck of a spaceship. Or maybe, like Alice, I've gone straight through the looking glass. Except I'm actually in a giant warehouse – aptly not far from Disneyland – which is home to TeamLab Planets, a 'multi-sensory experience' of the kind you could only

find in a crazy city like Tokyo.

Consisting of several different rooms, which include one filled with vast, inflatable globes which change colour when you tap them, one filled knee-high with water, on which are projected beautiful animations of koi carp, and another which screens kaleidoscopic images of flowers and plants across a galaxy, which you can only really watch without feeling nauseous by lying down on the floor, this is modern art mixed with entertainment, Japanese style.

Having started life as a temporary digital art exhibition in 2016, in this new, permanent location it's been packing in visitors keen to roam around this huge space, where you go barefoot, the better to feel the different flooring textures – squishy,

The streets around Tsujiki are thronged with food stalls and restaurants



The TeamLab Planets exhibition, main; wholesalers check bluefin tuna at the new Toyosu Market

fuzzy, wet – and delight in acting like a kid again. I've never encountered anything quite like it; when I leave, I can't stop smiling. Tokyo, of course, has form for this kind of thing; from robot receptionists (at the nearby Henn Na hotel), to restaurants which deliver your meals by miniature trains (you'll find that at Niagara Curry in the Yutenji district), or virtual reality theme parks (try VR Park in Shibuya to grapple with imaginary adversaries in fantasy locations), it's always made headlines for being cutting edge. Essentially,

Tokyo was living in the 21st century when the rest of us were barely halfway through the 20th. Its neon-drenched, *Blade Runner*-esque image has filtered into our consciousness for the past few decades, and a visit is a guaranteed culture shock.

It's my third time here, and I'm still as enchanted and overawed by it as I was the first time. And, like many others, I find the real appeal comes as much from the city's many, and thriving, pockets of tradition, as it does from its shiny new tech. And nowhere is that easier to observe than when it comes to food. The day after my immersive, arty experience, I head to the site of the former fish market, in Tsujiki. For over 80 years, since it opened in 1935, this was the largest wholesale fish and seafood market in the world, with traders auctioning off everything from seaweed to caviar, sardines to whale meat. The most popular sight, for tourists, was the tuna auction; in 2013, the most expensive one ever sold here, weighing 230kg, went for around \$1.8 million. The guy who bought it for his restaurant basically got so much in the way of free

publicity that his premises have been packed out ever since.

Last October, however, the site moved to newer, more modern and efficient premises in Toyosu, five minutes' drive away, but the streets around Tsujiki are still thronged with food stalls and restaurants. Strolling around them is a veritable assault on all the senses, from the scents of dozens of different types of food – from sweet egg omelette to dry, shredded squid – to the shouts of hawkers ushering you to try their wares, to sights like the restaurant proudly displaying a giant, glistening, bright-eyed tuna head outside, proof it was bought just this morning. Queues form around the more popular stalls, such as the one selling rice balls stuffed with fillings like pickled plums, seafood, or dried flakes of bonito (a small, tuna-like fish) – apparently they sell over 2,000 pieces a day. Moving on, I'm transfixed by the man who takes a handful of baby octopi, dips them in flour, then flattens them between two hotplates until they are basically one giant sheet of crackly, crispy octopus, which looks exactly like a square of marbled paper. Clearly, I have to buy one, and break off shards as I stroll around, enjoying the salty, fishy crunch.

Later, I check out a couple of shopping districts; Ginza has a smattering of high end brands, mixed with more affordable, high street and department stores, while upmarket Omotesando is where to head for Bond-Street-style designer labels. What makes the shops here stand out is their incredible, futuristic architecture; it's worth the trip for this alone. From Louis Vuitton, designed to look like a series of glass trunks stacked on top of each other, to the medieval-tower-like HQ of Hugo Boss, or the quirky, diamond-paned Prada, they make for an arresting sight. Afterwards, another contrast; the elegant Sensoji temple in Asakusa, the oldest in the city. It's notable for the huge red lantern which hangs at its impressive gate – known as Thunder Gate – the main building then reached up a pathway lined with enterprising souvenir-sellers. Outside, smoke from worshippers' incense drifts hazily in



the air, and you could fancy yourself back in the seventh century, when the temple was first built, if it weren't for all the yammering tourists with selfie sticks...

I bookend my visit with a final contemporary experience, and check out the Mori Art Museum (mori.art.museum/en/), a gallery at the top of Roppongi Hills Mori Tower, a slick, urban development which holds the distinction of being the sixth-tallest building in the city – though for how long, who knows? The Museum, on the 53rd floor, opened in 2003, and is considered one of the best art institutions in Tokyo, displaying work from high calibre names such as Ai Weiwei, and video artist Bill Viola. After strolling around its latest exhibition, called, not very cheerily, Catastrophe, I make a beeline for the tower's observation deck, on the 52nd floor. By now dusk is falling, and Tokyo is illuminated far below me, a haze of twinkling lights. In amongst them all rises the triangular, orange and white striped Toyko Tower, looking like a traffic-cone copy of its Parisian counterpart. Up here, floating above the chaos of a city of nearly ten million people, everything feels almost timeless. Old and new blend seamlessly; Tokyo in a nutshell. ■

Lufthansa flies from Edinburgh to Tokyo via Frankfurt from around £499 return; book via Lufthansa.com. Double rooms at the Conrad Tokyo start from around £335 per night, while executive rooms start from around £420 per night; to book, visit conradhotels.com.



View of Tokyo at night, above; TwentyEight, the bar at the Conrad Tokyo, top

SHORT HAUL



Nights on the tiles

In Lisbon, Gaby Soutar finds a city of seafood, pastel de nata, fado, cheese – and Monica Bellucci

The taxi drivers in Lisbon are VERY keen to sell their city. And that involves making sure passengers know that the actor once described as the most beautiful woman in the world lives in a house near their Sao Jorge Castle.

For the capital of a country whose emblem is the proud yet humble rooster, it's a very glamorous destination.

Our Monica Bellucci-smitten driver drops us off at the Tivoli Avenida Liberdade Lisboa after a 15 minute journey from the airport.

By this time, he's also revealed that Madonna has a home in the capital, and John Malkovich part owns a restaurant, Bico da Sapata, here.

I'd imagine that, if they didn't already own Lisbon mansions, these celebs might be staying somewhere like this.

Our 285-room five star hotel, built in 1933, is situated on the Avenida da Liberdade – a leafy promenade lined with designer shops and restaurants.

You get an instant hit of excitement when entering, since the atrium is so spectacularly theatrical. It's a social space, lined with balconies, and there's a branch of high-end boutique, Loewe, plus a Lobby Bar at one end, where they serve a light menu.

However, the focal point is a long table laden with giant floral displays – lilies, pussy willow and, very aptly on our visit, lucky white heather.

Their basement Anantara Spa offers therapies, including their prana-promoting signature massage, which takes place in one of their apartment sized treatment rooms. There's also an outdoor swimming pool, surrounded by loungers and palms. It was winter on our visit though, and an ice-cold plunge didn't take our fancy.

Our bedroom was very pared-back and chic, in its neutral tones, with a fancy marble bathroom, where we primped for dinner.

The rooftop Sky Bar was closed on our visit (it's shut from October to March), and their new Art Deco inspired Seen Lisboa eatery was booked up,

We had hoped to go watch some fado singers, but, as they generally come with a meal, and the hotel's other restaurant, Cervejaria Liberdade, looked so tempting, we ended up missing their mournful tunes and guitar strumming.

Oh well, by staying put, we got to try practically everything that our taxi driver had recommended – octopus, the soft white cheese that is queijo de Azeitão, cod and black

pork. It was utter heaven, no sad song needed.

The only thing we didn't eat was a pastel de nata, since they're really more of a breakfast or tea time thing.

All the tourists queue up for the supposedly best in town at Pasteis de Belem – a tram ride away, in an area where you can cross the rickety wooden bridge to Belem Tower, walk the cloisters of Jeronimos Monastery, see the Museu Nacional dos Coches (yes, a museum of coaches), and discover the architecturally incredible MAAAT (Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology) on the banks of the Tagus river.

You get an instant hit of excitement when entering the atrium

We did all of that, but after a lengthy wait to get into the tower, we were too impatient to hang around for custard tarts.

Thus, we skipped the chaotic block-long Pasteis de Belem throng, and ended up at a corner cafe called Versailles, where we shared three very good ones. I guess we'll never know how they compare, though ours looked triple the size, so that's one point in the quieter cafe's favour.

They gave us enough of a sugar boost to make it to Baixa, where

Clockwise from main: Belem Tower on the Tagus River; Tivoli Avenida Liberdade hotel; view of the city

you'll find the Elevador de Santa Justa, among other attractions, and Chiado, for boutiques that include the marvellous A Vida Portuguesa. It sells authentic products, like gorgeously packaged lotions and potions, stationery, toys, food and, most importantly for me, ceramics. I left with a sardine, a white caterpillar on a leaf dish, and their signature swallow by artist Bordalo Pinheiro.

I carried my swag up the steep hill to our final destination – the ruins of Sao Jorge Castle.

It was early evening when we reached the citadel walls. There were peacocks roosting way up in the trees, and the colourful city with its tiled streets and red roofs looked beautiful.

I hope Monica Bellucci appreciates this view as much as the taxi drivers of Lisboa appreciate her. ■

Rooms start from £161 at the Tivoli Avenida Liberdade (Avenida da Liberdade, 185 1269-050, Lisboa). For more information, call (+351) 21 319 89 00 or see www.tivolihotels.com. For more information on Lisbon, see www.visitlisboa.com. Their Lisboa Card starts from €19 for 24 hours and includes free admission to some 29 museums, monuments and places of interest, plus discounts on many more.

48 HOURS IN

Kinghorn

Friday, midday

Check into the Bay Hotel (doubles from £85, www.thebayhotel.net). The split-level family suites have Forth views and private terraces.

1pm

Catch the train one stop to Kirkcaldy and enjoy lunch at the ace new Baker's Field (www.thebakersfieldcafe.com). This vegetarian and vegan cafe offers superb food, as well as arguably the best coffee in town.

2pm

Walk west back along the Fife Coastal Path, which opens up a swathe of rugged coast on the short section back to Kinghorn. Make sure to stop off at Seafield Tower en route.

4pm

The path brings you to Kinghorn's own beach where you can relax and gaze across the estuary towards Edinburgh.

7pm

Enjoy dinner with more Forth views at the Horizons restaurant back at the Bay Hotel. East Neuk haddock and chips star on the menu, battered or breaded.

Saturday, 10am

Start the day with a refreshing dip in the swimming pool at the Bay Hotel.

Midday

Drive out to Room with a View (www.roomwithaviewrestaurant.co.uk) and enjoy seafood with more epic Forth views as a backdrop.

1:30pm

Enjoy a stroll along the sweeping



beach of Silversands just across the headland from the restaurant.

4pm

Stop off on the return journey at the memorial to Alexander III, the king whose tragic death here kicked off the tumultuous regal power struggles and played a major role in the Wars of Scottish Independence.

7pm

Dine on hearty food down in Kinghorn at the Harbour View (tel: 01592 890577) just back from the Forth.

9pm

Finish off the night with a game of snooker or a nightcap back at the Bay Hotel.

Sunday, 9am

Either hit the massive beach that sprawls its tentacles out in front of the hotel, or take it easy at the hotel swimming pool. ■

Robin McKelvie

You will need a car or a bike for exploring the area of Fife around Kinghorn. Holiday Autos (www.holidayautos.com) can arrange car hire from a number of locations. For more information on the area see www.visitscotland.com

BARGAIN BREAKS

On the rails

McKinlay Kidd has expanded its train holidays to include five expert-guided small group rail tours of Scotland. These include the North Highlands & Orkney Guided Rail Tour, which consists of a journey on the Far North Line to Wick, the ferry to Skara Brae, a visit to Dunrobin Castle and more. This costs from £1,765pp (two sharing), including six nights' accommodation, travel, tours, some meals, an Orkney Explorer Pass (free entry to all Orkney sites), a local tour leader and all transfers. Departures on 23 June and 24 August. **Call 0141-260 9260 or see www.mckinlaykidd.com**

Fun in Malta

Jet2holidays is offering seven nights' B&B at the three-star Gillieru Hotel in St Paul's Bay, Malta, plus flights from Glasgow on 14 March, all from £319pp based on two sharing. **Call 0800 408 5594 or see www.jet2holidays.com**

Beautiful, beautiful...

Prices start from £270pp for a three night holiday in Copenhagen with Travel Republic. This includes room only accommodation at the four star First Hotel Twentyseven and return flights from Edinburgh departing on 19 March. **Call 020 8974 7200 or see www.travelrepublic.co.uk**