



TRAVEL

TOKYO STORY

A trip to Tokyo in the company of chef Daniel Calvert of Michelin-starred restaurant Sézanne showcases superb food, high-end ingredients and hip bars, finds **LAURA MILLAR**



BIG MIKAN:
The Shinjuku district of Tokyo twinkles as the sun sets over the city and the Kantō mountain range

THERE ARE STACKS of orange and white snow crabs at Toyosu fish market in Tokyo, their serrated claws still gently moving; buckets of sleek, wriggling, jet-black eels; rows of local fish, *amadai*, with their glittering pink iridescent scales; plump, giant scallops displayed proudly on their shells; spiky sea urchins; piles of octopus tentacles, and more – all of them caught just a few hours before.

Japan is a country where ingredients are revered and treated accordingly, prepared with a stringent sense of perfection and emphasis on flavour. I'm with Daniel Calvert, whose restaurant Sézanne, in the Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi, has garnered two Michelin stars since opening in 2021. "Around 70% of my menu is seafood," he tells me. "Why wouldn't I use the best produce I've got access to?"

Tokyo's famous fish market used to be at Tsukiji in the city centre, but in 2018 it upped sticks and relocated to this new, more modern site further south. The reason? They'd simply run out of room. Today, this globally renowned wholesale and auction space covers a mind-boggling four million square feet, and from 5.30am to 6.30am it's a lively riot of buying, selling, and frantic hand-signalling, interspersed with the market's distinctive electric turret trucks ferrying around bundles of freshly-packed fish and seafood.

Unlike at Tsukiji, these days visitors aren't allowed on the trading floor – although you can apply for a pass to view it from a dedicated area – but I arrive just after the prestigious daily tuna auction ends and am whisked into the main building by Calvert. As he leads me up and down narrow alleyways lined with individual suppliers, exchanging greetings with his reliable regulars, he introduces me to a spectacular variety of sea creatures, some of which I've never even heard of. ↘

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↳ In Tokyo, you can find anything from a cheap, steaming bowl of ramen served out of a hole-in-the-wall noodle shop, to beer and grilled meat skewers in a rowdy izakaya, or an elegant, multi-course kaiseki eaten at a small, exclusive counter. And, judging by the wealth of Japanese restaurants across London, it's something our jaded British palates are increasingly seeking more of: take recent openings such as Sushi by MASA at Harrods - the first London outpost for Michelin-starred

chef Masayoshi Takayama - the low-key Edo Izakaya in Old Street, and the eye-wateringly expensive Sushi Kanesaka in Mayfair, not to mention 2024's highly anticipated Endo at The OWO, from sushi master Endo Kazutoshi. And here in this shimmering, neon-soaked metropolis full of temples, towering skyscrapers and epic traffic crossings, the message comes across loud and clear: you can have anything you want - as long as it's been created with the utmost care and precision.

This is evident when I sample lunch at Calvert's flagship restaurant, an alluring, airy, dusky-pink-and-grey-toned space on the seventh floor of the Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi (he also oversees a more brasserie-style French restaurant, Maison Marunouchi, where you'll find simple, elegant Gallic options such as puffy cheese gougeres and croque-madames). Surrey-born Calvert, still only 35 years old, has an impressive CV which includes time spent working in three-star restaurants in Paris, such as Epicure at Le Bristol, a stint at Per Se in New York, and, latterly, heading up a more casual bistro, Belon, in Hong Kong. When he was approached by Four Seasons to helm his own restaurant, he jumped at the chance. "That's an offer you don't refuse," he tells me later. "It's now my name over the door; it's like going to the Champions League. I was given carte blanche, but the only stipulations were that we had to win two Michelin stars and be on the World's 50 Best List."

Well, that's job done; the first star was awarded within six months of opening, the second following a year later, and it's not hard to see why. Sézanne offers a high-end, seasonally-changing omakase tasting menu, the number of courses varying according to what's available. But Calvert is keen to emphasise that Sézanne is not a Japanese restaurant - although the majority of the ingredients are - but European; meticulous French techniques are his biggest cooking influence. Open for lunch and dinner four times a week, diners are treated to friendly but impeccably choreographed service, from the pouring of a welcome glass of Krug to the wheeling out of trolleys to showcase a cut of fish or meat, while a long glass panel at the back of the room displays Calvert and his calm, dedicated team at work in the kitchen. A couple of signature dishes are always on the menu: house-aged venison from Hokkaido, beloved by Calvert as it's tender and not

too gamey, and pigeon marinated in yellow wine for seven days, influenced by his time in Hong Kong, and cooked Shanghaiese style. Depending on the season, you might also find delicate soft-shell turtle soup, meaty matsutake mushrooms en papillote, or the wildly popular hairy crab, only available during two months of the year. With menus from ¥22,000 for lunch (approximately £118), it's phenomenal value for food of this quality.

However, just as in London, you can find incredible food at inexpensive price points in Tokyo, if you just know where to look. I have breakfast one morning just a few steps away from the Four Seasons, in Tokyo's main railway station. Forget a lukewarm toastie from Costa or a limp WH Smith meal deal; I was heading for Ramen Street, an area in the station's basement which does exactly what it says on the tin. A wide passageway is lined with a dozen or so casual restaurants. They all offer broadly the same option from behind their short-curtained entrances: a vast bowl of intensely savoury pork tonkotsu or miso broth loaded with thin wheat or thick udon noodles, and a variety of toppings from pork belly to chicken, mushrooms, boiled egg, tofu and black sheets of nori, served with an array of condiments like chilli flakes, soy sauce, and pickled ginger. I place my order from the vending machine-style system outside. The chefs in the steamy kitchen get to work, my meal arriving on the table within minutes - all for under a fiver. In short, it's epic, delicious, and almost worth missing your train for.

I'm glad I don't, however, because I'm off to explore the city. First stop, the Harajuku district. The source inspiration for Gwen Stefani's 2004 hit, Harajuku Girls, this is where Tokyo's fashion-obsessed teens hang out. Takeshita Street is where you'll find anything from anime and Lolita

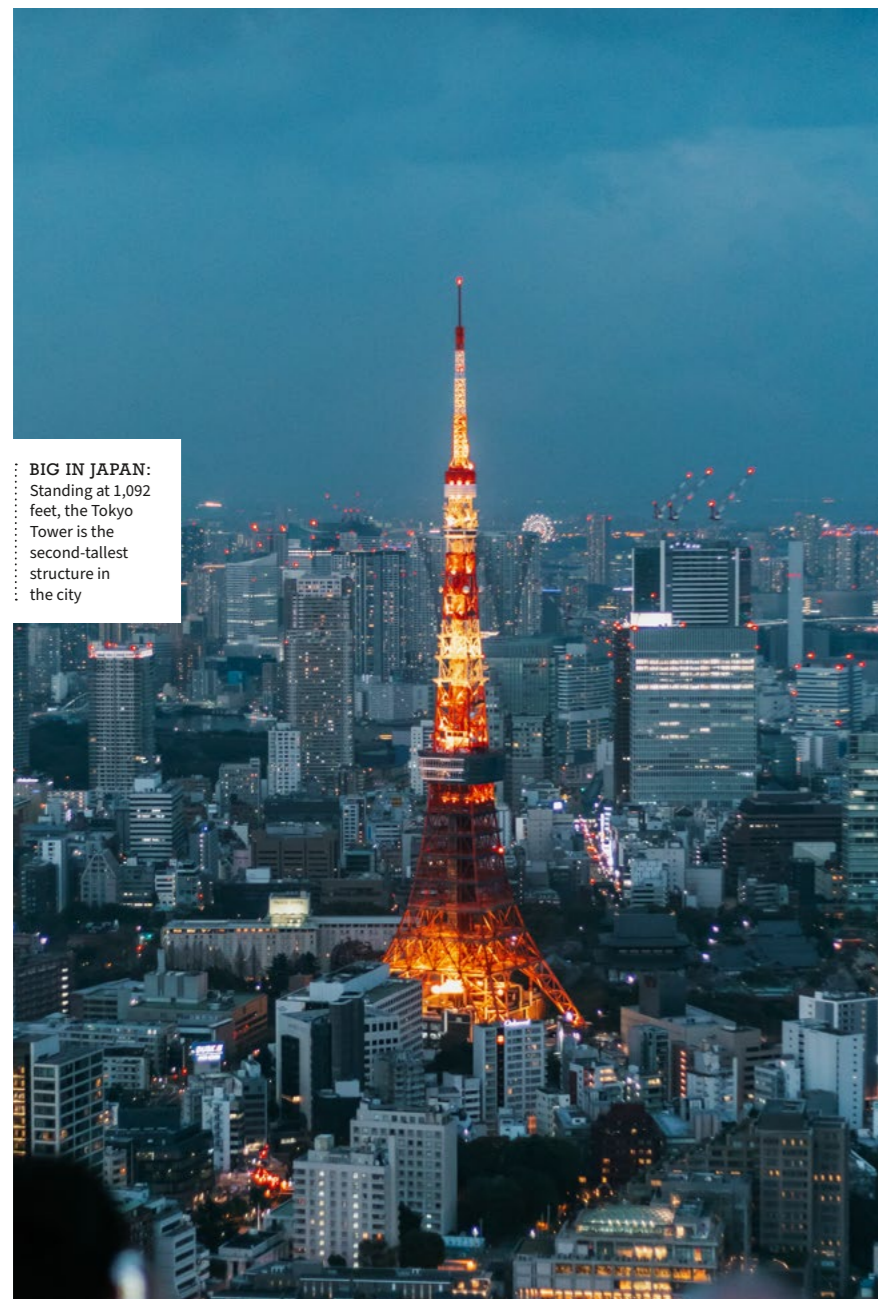


DINING BY THE LIGHT: [clockwise from top] The VIRTU cocktail lounge at Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Otemachi; the facade of Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Marunouchi; a spring-themed plate at Four Seasons Hotel Tokyo at Otemachi

costumes to shiba inu cafes (yes, you can pet these adorably fluffy dogs while sipping on a coffee, although I do balk slightly when I see a sign for an otter cafe) and all sorts of wacky stuff like headbands adorned with cat ears or unicorn horns, rainbow-coloured candyfloss or cakes shaped like the poo emoji. The whole area is almost too twee for words, but as a way of trying to understand a particular element of Japanese culture, *kawaii* - which means cuteness - it's pretty useful.

By total contrast, I next surface from Tokyo's sprawling but efficient underground system in Omotesando, an elegant, high-end neighbourhood whose main thoroughfare is the equivalent of London's Bond Street or Paris' Champs-Elysees. Every store is an

architectural marvel, housing international designers from Balenciaga to Hermes and Gucci. As a shopping destination, it's unfortunately too rich for my blood, so I head somewhere I know I'm going to come back with souvenirs. Anyone obsessed with food has to make a pilgrimage to Kappabashi Street. Informally known as 'kitchen town', this kilometre-long stretch of restaurant supply stores bursts with all the tools a professional - or amateur - cook could ever need. You'll find everything from handcrafted carving knives to lacquered chopsticks, painted ceramic bowls, hipster denim aprons, chefs' whites, industrial fridges and more. My favourite? The shops which sell the plastic replicas of food and drink displayed in many restaurants' ↘



BIG IN JAPAN: Standing at 1,092 feet, the Tokyo Tower is the second-tallest structure in the city

© Tokyo Tower / James Reil Dyer / JNTO; Four Seasons exterior / Jan Becke



Takeshita Street is where you'll find anything from anime and Lolita costumes to shiba inu cafes



UP THE STREET: [clockwise from left] A street scene in the business district of Marunouchi; The Bar and Champagne Lounge; tomatoes with edible flowers

▸ windows, such as bowls of ramen, platters of seafood, frothy-topped, frosty glasses of beer and even fried chicken nuggets. I leave, heavily laden with sushi magnets and cute cat-shaped chopstick rests.

But now it's time to get high – sky high, that is. Some of Tokyo's best locations are elevated, and that evening I start in Shibuya, home to the pedestrian crossing known as the world's busiest, with at least a quarter of a million people estimated to use it every day. I get a bird's eye view of it from

Shibuya Sky, an observation deck spread over the 46th and 47th floors of a glass and steel office block, which opened in 2021. Tokyo is spread out below me, lights glittering; I can even see the neon-orange-and-white-striped, Eiffel Tower-shaped edifice that is the Tokyo Tower. At 333m high, it's the second-highest structure in Japan – I'm currently at a mere 230m, but the view is still impressive. A short cab drive away is the Park Hyatt hotel. I recreate that 'relaxing time – Suntory time' feeling with

I get a bird's eye view of it from the observation deck at Shibuya Sky



a drink at the New York Bar which featured in Sofia Coppola's 2003 *Scarlett Johansson* and Bill Murray hit, *Lost in Translation*. Located on the 52nd floor, and with tasteful live jazz – of course – playing seductively in the background, I get good views over the buzzy Shinjuku district as I sip an L.I.T cocktail: a mix of sake, Sakura liqueur, Peachtree liqueur, and cranberry juice.

I save maybe the best for last. VIRTÙ is an ultra-sexy, opulent, low-lit space on the 39th floor of Tokyo's second, and most recently opened Four Seasons hotel, in the business district of Otemachi, which has already made its debut on Asia's 50 Best Bars list (it's currently at number 20). Designed by Japanese firm, Studio Spin, it's all backlit bar shelves, leather banquettes, and lacquered wall panels. The cocktail menu, overseen by head bartender Keith Motsi of Soho House, lives up to the surroundings. I try the Fig Cognac and Spices, which tastes like a boozy Christmas biscuit, then the dramatically presented Smoked Ume Fashioned, revealed from under a glass dome.

My fellow drinkers are a mix of those here for a pre-dinner aperitif before heading to the hotel's impeccable Michelin-starred restaurant, est, overseen by French chef Guillaume Bracaval, influencers posing for likes, and dressed-up couples on dates. As I snap a photo of my cocktail's beautifully engraved ice cube, I can't help thinking it sums up my whole Tokyo experience; creative, elegant and full of exquisite attention to detail. f

BA flies from London to Tokyo from £888 return, ba.com; rooms at Four Seasons Marunouchi start from £625 per night, fourseasons.com/tokyo

