

# Eating & Drinking

## Can't find an early-morn breakfast?

We know, it's damn near impossible in Tokyo. But we've made it our mission to bring you five delicious breakfasts, all served from 7am. A round of applause for **Ili Saarinen** (words) and **Yasuhisa Shimbo** (photographs)

**G**etting a decent breakfast in Tokyo is no problem at all – unless you'd actually like to have your morning meal in, uh, the morning. Until very recently, the pickings have been extremely slim for early risers, limited mainly to the ubiquitous convenience stores and centrally located branches of Starbucks and smoky local competitor Doutor. And even though things have improved, pancakes, French toast, açaí bowls and other trendy treats – breakfast as their origins may be – are apparently only fit to be served hours after your average salaryman has clocked in at the office.

Still, the belated brunch revolution that's been shaking up the city's restaurant scene over the past five years or so is, slowly but surely, also impacting early-morning eating. Spotting a breakfast joint worthy of the moniker remains a challenge, but it's now become one well worth taking up. We set our alarm clocks, crawled out of bed before dawn, and embarked on a quest to find Tokyo's top early-bird eateries, all open from no later than 7am.

### SAWAMURA

**Best for: freshly baked treats and piping hot omelettes**

Hailing from the resort town of Karuizawa, the sleek and stylish but homely Sawamura deals in artisanal bread, pastries and a range of savoury baked treats on the quieter side of Hiroo, a brisk walk north from the station towards Nishi-Azabu. Take your pick of excellent croissants, sourdough rolls, quiche and the like at the ground-floor café, or head upstairs to the restaurant for more substantial meals. The breakfast menu lists six set options, from Nicoise-style salad to sausage, eggs and bacon: we're especially fond of the fluffy Spanish-style omelettes, served in a hot iron pan and accompanied by a plate with salad, veggie appetisers and Sawamura's signature toast, plus coffee, tea or juice. An accurate English menu is available, and the service is relaxed but impeccably friendly. 5-1-6 Minami-Azabu, Minato (Hiroo Station). 03 5421 8686. [b-sawamura.com/hiroo](http://b-sawamura.com/hiroo) (Japanese only). Café open daily 7am-10pm, breakfast served 7am-10am.



### BONDI COFFEE SANDWICHES

**Best for: whole-grain goodness**

Although Bondi sits right behind the University of Tokyo's Komaba campus, the clientele is more Shibuya office lady than future bureaucrat at this hip café specialising in – you guessed it – sandwiches. With an Australian surf atmosphere befitting the name, pop art on the walls, long communal benches and free wi-fi, it's a comfy spot that just happens to also bake some of the best bread in the area. The whole-grain, fully vegan baguettes can be had with filling mixtures from chicken and avocado to all-veg and BLTE, none of which will set you back more than ¥650. We also love the flat white coffees and figure-friendly eggs benedict with avocado (¥850), slapped on top of a whole-grain loaf instead of the usual English muffin. A real Aussie brekkie on a Shibuya backstreet? You best believe it. 2-22-8 Tomigaya, Shibuya (Komaba-Todaimae Station). 03 5738 7730. [tinyurl.com/TOTbondi](http://tinyurl.com/TOTbondi). Daily 7am-8pm.



### IWASA SUSHI

**Best for: the ultimate Tsukiji spread**

Breakfast at Tsukiji is an essential Tokyo experience, and one that tends to be better the earlier you arrive at the world-famous fish market. Most eateries both inside and around the market open at 6am and serve up their tastiest treats right from the get-go – arrive a few hours later and you're likely to be greeted with 'sold out' signs and apologetic bows at the most popular spots. The folks behind Iwasa, one of these top purveyors, buy up the finest seafood available every day and turn it into trademark Tsukiji sushi, but their operation has so far managed to avoid the kind of tourist-inflicted overcrowding seen at some of the more centrally located shops. For the whole nine yards, there's no beating the 13-piece omakase (chef's selection) set (¥3,600), although the tokujo (special) nigiri set (¥3,100) might make for a more gentle awakening for your innards. Tsukiji Market Bldg 1, 5-2-1 Tsukiji, Chuo (Tsukiji-Shijo Station). 03 3544 1755. [iwasasushi.com/en](http://iwasasushi.com/en). Mon-Fri 6am-2.30pm, Sat 6am-3pm, closed Sun, hols and 2nd & 4th Wed of every month.



### LA VIE (HILLTOP HOTEL)

**Best for: orthodox washoku**

Entering the Hilltop Hotel in Ochanomizu is like stepping into a bygone era: formally dressed clerks move gracefully across the retro lobby, where mostly elderly Japanese patrons lounge on vintage leather couches, sipping whisky or scribbling in notebooks. We imagine this joint – once a regular hangout for Japan's literati from Nobel Prize winner Yasunari Kawabata to 'shitamachi poet' Shotaro Ikenami – has hardly undergone any visible changes since it opened back in 1954. Served at the La Vie restaurant, the Hilltop's venerable washoku breakfast has also stayed the same for decades: although the main dishes rotate daily, you can always look forward to an impeccably presented set of rice, miso soup, assorted tsukemono pickles, fish, tamagoyaki omelette and a side of stewed veg – a wonderful harmony of textures and flavours that'll shake any lingering drowsiness right off. ¥2,200 (plus tax and service) for breakfast may sound steep, but you're paying for more than just the grub here. 1-1 Kanda-Surugadai, Chiyoda (Ochanomizu, Jinbocho stations). 03 3293 2836. [yamanoue-hotel.co.jp/eng/index.html](http://yamanoue-hotel.co.jp/eng/index.html). Breakfast served daily 7am-10.30am.



### IVY PLACE

**Best for: pancakes in the garden**

Already something of an institution among Tokyo's early risers, the effortlessly hip Ivy Place has been able to stay ahead of the competition with its generously sized but refined morning treats – and the location, part of Daikanyama's T-Site and complete with a garden terrace, hasn't hurt either. For a sweet start to the day, go for the classic buttermilk pancakes, served either simply with butter, maple syrup and honey, or with additional fruit toppings. The free coffee refills are always much appreciated as well, and help push Ivy Place's breakfast into that rarefied category of meals that have the power to turn even the gloomiest of mornings into something productive – or at least that's how we'd like to describe an entire day spent sniffing paper at Tsutaya Books next door. 16-15 Sarugakucho, Shibuya (Daikanyama Station). 03 6415 3232. [www.tysonsjp/ivyplace/en](http://www.tysonsjp/ivyplace/en). Breakfast served daily 7am-10.45am.