



Q: WHY IS SUGAMO KNOWN AS 'HARAJUKU FOR GRANNIES'?

Harajuku may be Tokyo's centre for flamboyant youth fashion, but Sugamo is where the golden generation go to strut their styles. This otherwise unspectacular corner of Toshima ward is famed for its Jizo-dori, an 800m shopping street where elderly folks from all over the city and further afield stroll, shop and spend quality time with each other. Although the area essentially owes its popularity among retirees to a single statue – a depiction of the Jizo bodhisattva housed at **Koganji Temple** (3-35-2 Sugamo, Toshima, 03 3917 8221), more on that in a moment – its charm has far deeper roots nowadays.

Passing underneath the sign that marks the entrance to Jizo-dori – a ubiquitous prop on Japanese television whenever anything senior-related gets airtime – you'll soon notice that the doorways to virtually every shop, café, clinic and pub lining the street are free of stairs or other obstacles, with most wide enough to be entered in wheelchair. Equally accessible is the grand temple around which Jizo-dori originally developed, where visitors from near and far queue up for their turn to wash the iron likeness of Togenuki Jizo, the miracle-making statue said to have the power to heal any ailment. Doing the deed at least once a month is supposed to ensure optimal health benefits – a dictate much appreciated by local merchants and eateries, we're sure.

But a barrier-free environment is about more than just smooth streets and ramps: those working customer service in Sugamo are used to the elderly, exhibit remarkable flexibility and even speak at a less hectic pace than their counterparts elsewhere in the city. It's this welcoming attitude that keeps seniors coming back, although the low prices certainly help too: our favourite deal is the array of age-related discounts offered by the **Uruulu** nail salon (2F, 3-21-17

Sugamo, Toshima, 090 4676 2580, umeda67.wixsite.com/uruulu, 10am-5pm, closed Wed, Sun & hols), where anyone over 50 gets 50 percent off, those over 60 get 60 percent and so on – 100-year-olds can have their talons tended to for free.

Visiting Sugamo is best done on the fourth, 14th or 24th day of the month, when local shops and restaurants put out stalls over the length of Jizo-dori and the line at Koganji snakes out through the temple gates. If you can't make it on any of these dates, consider going on Sunday, when the shopping street is off limits to cars between noon and 6pm (3-6pm on other days). Once you've picked up some luck-bringing red underwear – a Sugamo speciality sold at several different outlets in the area – stop for a cup of matcha tea and some traditional Japanese sweets at the **Kanro Shichifukujin café** (3-37-5 Sugamo, Toshima, 03 5394 3694, 11am-6pm, closed Thu), where a trio of well-fed cats stand guard and occasionally step inside to play with the patrons. For a more substantial meal, opt for **Takeyama** (3-37-2 Sugamo, Toshima, 03 3915 5709, daily 9.30am-6pm), where carnivorous seniors can be seen digging into hamburger steaks and pan-fried ginger pork. — *Ili Saarinen*



PHOTOS: MISA TOSHIMA



Q: WHICH TOKYO NEIGHBOURHOOD IS BEST FOR A RELAXING DAY OUT WITH THE KIDS?

For a day out that won't leave you so exhausted that you'll fall asleep in your dinner, head to Kichijoji. First stop: the newly renovated Coppice complex, on the north side of the station, for a little retail therapy. The fifth floor contains a lineup of Japanese kids' clothing brands including Breeze and Sense of Wonder, and the world's first 'Eric Carle Plaza', dedicated to the 'Very Hungry Caterpillar' author. After working up an appetite, make your way to the opposite side of the station for lunch at Café & Meal Muji, found on the seventh floor of the Marui department store. The spacious interior is perfect for families worried about bulky strollers, while nursing stations are available within the department store. While there's no kids' menu, you won't need one – Muji is committed to serving freshly prepared dishes using in-season ingredients and without preservatives. For little ones that have energy to burn after lunch, it's a quick stroll over to Inokashira Park. A few trips around the swan boat-dotted, sakura tree-lined pond and their precious eyes will start to droop – the perfect signal to head home with a peacefully sleeping child. — *Amanda Imasaka*

→ Coppice: 1-11-5 Kichijoji-Honcho, Musashino. 0422 27 2100. coppice.jp. Daily 10am-9pm.
→ Café & Meal Muji: Marui Kichijoji 7F, 1-7-1 Kichijoji-Minamicho, Musashino. 0422 72 8180. muji.com/jp/shop/045195. Daily 10.30am-8pm.

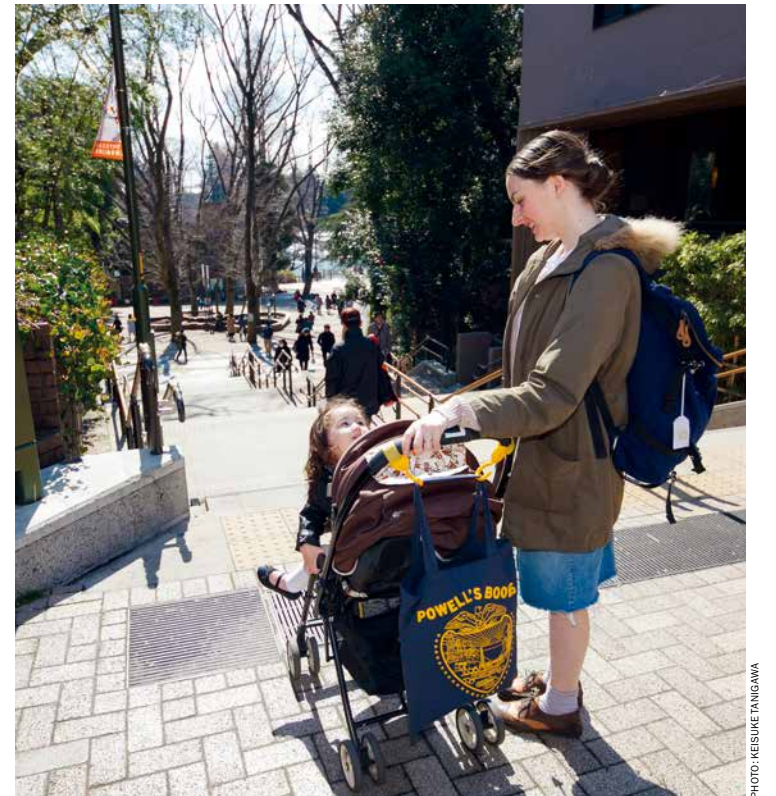


PHOTO: KEISUKE TANGAWA



Try Shinjuku Gyoen, an easy ten-minute walk from the New South exit of Shinjuku Station, which is accessible by elevator. A mere ¥200 buys an adult ticket (kids under six enter for free) and you get access to the traditional Japanese, French and English gardens, large open lawns and the teahouse. Alcohol is prohibited on the grounds, so it's an ideal space for sakura-viewing with children, without the worry of long bathroom waits or noisy neighbours. Bring a plastic sheet or blanket, pack a picnic (or buy one at the station), and stay for the day – there are plenty of changing stations and nursing rooms throughout the grounds. Note that the park is closed on Mondays and bicycles are prohibited. — *Amanda Imasaka*
→ 11 Naitomachi, Shinjuku (Shinjuku-Gyoenmae Station). 03 3350 0151. tinyurl.com/TOTgyoen. 9am-4pm, closed Mon (Tue if Mon is a holiday).

Q: WHAT'S A GOOD PLACE FOR ENTERTAINING CHILDREN ON A RAINY DAY?

Head to the Kawaii Monster Cafe for a taste of the kind of Harajuku subculture both you and your kids can enjoy. It's easily accessible from two stations, with elevator access and stroller parking in the monster's mouth (lobby). The 90-minute lunch time table limit that allows for wait times of just 30min or under – even on crowded weekends – is a lifesaver, and the 'Monster girls' greeting you at the door are dressed in the latest Harajuku fashions. Plus, you're actually encouraged to leave your seat and admire the decorations that just beg for family selfies. There's a ¥500 table charge, along with a required purchase of one drink and food item per head, meaning that you'll be paying at least ¥1,200 per person. One downside – despite a significant number of customers accompanied by young children, there's no changing table or nursing space. For parents with kids on the autism spectrum or with a sensory processing disorder, try the Tokyo Toy Museum in Yotsuya for a calmer indoor experience. — *Amanda Imasaka*

→ YM Square Bldg 4F, 4-31-10 Jingumae, Shibuya (Harajuku, Meiji-Jingumae stations). tinyurl.com/TOTkawaiimonster. Mon-Sat 11.30am-4.30pm, 6pm-10.30pm, Sun & hols 11am-8pm.

