

## SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

### top picks

- **Sumō Wrestling** (p197) – Watch the big guys take each other on at this traditional Japanese outing.
- **Baseball** (p198) – It may be as American as apple pie, but it's also as Japanese as raw tuna.
- **Sento** (p193) – Nothing treats those travel-worn bones like a good soak in a communal tub.
- **Ikebana** (p196) – It takes a lifetime to learn, but only a few classes to get the basics of flower-arranging.
- **Learn Japanese** (p195) – Nihongo wo wakarimasu ka? If not, then it might be time to learn the lingo.
- **Martial Arts** (p192) – Tokyo may be one of the world's safest cities, but it's still good to know how to defend yourself.
- **Cycle** (p195) – One of the best ways to learn the lay of the land is to travel with two wheels.
- **Conversation cafés** (p198) – Make new friends while helping a few Japanese people brush up on their English.
- **Golf** (p196) – Sure enough, 18 holes might break the bank, but it's a quintessential Japanese experience.
- **Horse racing** (p199) – See if you can win some extra yen.

What's your recommendation? [www.lonelyplanet.com/tokyo](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/tokyo)

# SPORTS & ACTIVITIES

Everyone needs to let off some steam once in a while, and though you may be working up a sweat navigating the streets, you may crave a more intense workout than the subway station stairs can offer. From martial arts training and pumping iron to a vigorous swim and a series of transcendental *asanas*, there is no shortage of sports on offer in the Japanese capital.

Even if you're not the athletic type, Tokyo brims with activities catering to both the casual dabbler and the devout practitioner. Try your hand at flower arranging, take a few Japanese classes, catch a few innings of baseball or, better yet, a few bouts of sumo.

Also open to the public are Tokyo's many public baths and hot springs. If you've had a long day of sight-seeing and are starting to feel a bit travel worn, a blissful soak in a steaming bath is indeed the perfect antidote.

## HEALTH & FITNESS

Most Tokyoites join private gyms or clubs to participate in recreational sports, which is why most facilities in the city are closed to nonmembers. However, you'll find that visitors do have access to some of the city's excellent, and heavily subsidised, public sports facilities.

## MARTIAL ARTS

Small *dōjō* (places of practice) of Japanese martial arts disciplines exist in neighbourhoods all over Tokyo, but most instruction and practice is conducted in Japanese. The following organisations can point you to *dōjō* where you may be able to take lessons or attend a training session.

### INTERNATIONAL AIKIDŌ FEDERATION Map pp48–9

国際合気道連盟

☎ 3203-9236; [www.aikido-international.org](http://www.aikido-international.org); Aikikai Foundation, 17-18 Wakamatsuchō, Shinjuku-ku; ☎ 6am–7.30pm Mon–Sat, 8.30–11.30am Sun; ㊤ Toei Ōedo Line to Wakamatsu-Kawada (main exit)

Practising at the Aikikai Foundation requires filling out an application form and paying a registration fee in addition to a monthly course fee. Shorter-term visitors should stop by during office hours to ask about *dōjō* where it's possible to drop in for training.

### KODŌKAN JUDŌ INSTITUTE Map p72

講道館

☎ 3818-4172; [www.kodokan.org](http://www.kodokan.org); 1-16-30 Kasuga, Bunkyo-ku; open practice ☎ 3.30–8pm Mon–Fri,

4-7.30pm Sat; ㊤ Toei Mita or Toei Ōedo Line to Kasuga (exits A1 & A2)

Students of judō who are looking to keep up their practice while in Tokyo are welcome to stop by Kōdōkan Judō Institute in the afternoons for open practice. Lessons are also available here on a long-term basis, and visitors are welcome to observe training during practice hours.

### KYŪMEIKAN off Map pp48–9

久明館

☎ 3930-4636; 2-1-7 Akatsuka-Shinmachi, Itabashi-ku; ㊤ Yūrakuchō Line to Chikatetsu-Narimasu (main exit)

Kyūmeikan *dōjō* welcomes foreign observers as well as practitioners of kendō (meaning 'way of the sword'), a discipline of wooden sword fighting that evolved from actual sword techniques used by samurai in battle. There's a fee of around ¥5000 for a lesson lasting one hour or more; those seeking to practise here can usually reach an English speaker on the phone at the *dōjō*.

### WORLD UNION OF KARATE-DŌ ORGANISATION (WUKO) Map p92

世界空手道連盟

☎ 3503-6640; [www.wuko-karate.org](http://www.wuko-karate.org); 4th fl, Sempaku Shinkokaikan Bldg, 1-15-16 Toranomon, Minato-ku; ㊤ Ginza Line to Toranomon, exit 2

Although Okinawa is the traditional home of Japan's most famous martial art, there are usually several *dōjō* in the city offering karate instruction, as well as semi-regular events and tournaments. For an excellent overview of what's going on in Tokyo as well as in the rest of the world, stop on by WUKO.

## SENTŌ PRIMER

Prior to Japan's miraculous postwar economic revolution, most private homes in Japan did not have baths, so every evening people gathered their toiletries into a bowl and headed off to the local neighbourhood *sentō* (public bath). More than just a place to wash oneself, the *sentō* served as a kind of community meeting hall, where news and gossip were traded and social ties strengthened.

Unfortunately, the number of *sentō* in Japan is rapidly declining, but there are still enough left in Tokyo for you to sample this most traditional aspect of Japanese life. More than just a cultural experience, however, a soak in a *sentō* is the ideal way to cure the sore muscles born of a day of sightseeing.

*Sentō* can be identified by their distinctive *noren* (half-length curtains over the doorway). *Sentō noren* usually bear the hiragana (ゆ, *yu*) for hot water (occasionally, it may be written in kanji: 湯). At the bottom of the *noren*, look for the kanji for men (男) and for women (女).

Once you've located a *sentō*, determine the men's or women's side, take off your shoes, place them in a locker in the entryway and slide open the door to the changing room. As you enter, you'll see the attendant, who sits midway between the men's and women's changing rooms, collecting the entry fee. *Sentō* usually cost between ¥300 and ¥500, which usually includes the rental of a modesty towel. If you've forgotten any of your toiletries, you can buy them here for a small price. Most *sentō* are open from around 3pm to midnight.

In the changing room, you'll see a bank of lockers and stacks of wicker or plastic baskets. Grab a basket and drop your clothes into it. Next, find one of the common *senmenki* (washbowls) and place your toiletries in it, then place your basket in a locker (these have keys on elastic bands). Now, use your modesty towel to cover up your sensitive bits, but don't be alarmed if others around you haven't – public nudity doesn't have the same negative connotation here as it does in the West.

Before you jump headfirst into the bath and immediately horrify all of your fellow bathers, you will first need to rigorously wash your entire body. This is done at the banks of low showers and taps that line the walls of the place. Grab a low stool and a bucket, and plant yourself at an open spot. First, fill the bucket with hot water and soap, work up a lather, and start scrubbing everywhere (and we do mean everywhere!). As a foreigner, your scrub-down process might be scrutinised by your fellow bathers, so it does pay to be thorough.

Once you've washed thoroughly and removed all the soap, you are ready for a relaxing soak in the tubs. At a good *sentō*, you'll have a choice of several tubs, which usually include a scalding tub, a cold tub and a whirlpool bath, as well as a sauna. At a great *sentō*, you may also find a variety of mineral water tubs and possibly even an electric bath, which, believe it or not, is meant to simulate swimming with electric eels!

While soaking in the tub, it's good form to adhere to the following etiquette: try not to enter the tub with your modesty towel, keep your head above the water, minimise your splashing and never wash yourself with the bath water. Otherwise, feel free to spread out, chit-chat with your fellow bathers and even take a snooze.

After soaking away the strains of the day, if you've done everything correctly, you will have achieved a state called *yude-dako* (boiled octopus). This is the point when you're going to want to rehydrate with a sports drink, or go for broke by downing a beer or two. Regardless of which route you choose, however, you're going to want to stagger home quickly and collapse onto your futon. Trust us – after a day at the *sentō*, you'll sleep like the dead.

## PUBLIC BATHS & HOT SPRINGS

It has been said that a few minutes in a public bath will teach you more about daily life in Tokyo than any book you could ever read. These incredible venues, which locals still seem to frequent even though almost all apartments in Tokyo have their own shower and bath, continue to be some of the most inclusive, amazing social spaces in the city.

Luckily, the metropolitan government seems to recognise this, and so every *sentō* (public bath) and *onsen* (hot spring) in the city is generously subsidised. This means you'll usually be charged only around ¥500 for

the perfect soak – what a steal. It also means you'll encounter people from all walks and at all stages of life – mafia bosses bathe solemnly alongside splashing toddlers and nobody bats an eye. If you're craving a detour that will take you off the beaten tourist path, this is it.

Though typically associated with mountain resorts and small country inns, several *onsen* are found in Tokyo. Most of these *onsen* draw their mineral water from deep underneath Tokyo Bay – by definition, what sets an *onsen* apart from a *sentō* is that *onsen* water must issue from a natural hot spring. *Sentō*, happily, can heat plain tap water to deliciously excruciating temperatures and bring baths to the city-dwelling masses.

## ASAKUSA KANNON SENTŌ Map p86

浅草観音温泉

☎ 3844-4141; 2-7-26 Asakusa, Taitō-ku; admission ¥700; 🕒 6.30am-6pm Fri-Wed; 📍 Ginza, Hibiya or Toei Asakusa Line to Asakusa (exit 6)

Near Sensō-ji, the water at this traditional bathhouse is a steamy 40°C. Asakusa's historic ambience makes this a great place for a soul-soothing soak.

## JAKOTSU-YU Map p86

蛇骨湯

☎ 3841-8645; 1-11-11 Asakusa, Taitō-ku; admission ¥400; 1pm-midnight Wed-Mon; 📍 Ginza Line to Tawaramachi (exit 3)

This Edo-era bath is one of our favourite *sentō* in Tokyo (and the preferred place of repose for neighbourhood *yakuza*, Japanese mafia, as well). First, be warned: the bathers here adore this place and initially will watch you carefully to make sure no dirty or soapy bodies make their way into the sacred tub. Once you've convinced them you're up to scrubbing every inch, head into the incredibly hot indoor soaking area where you'll be massaged by tea-coloured water that is propelled by vigorous jets. Once you're cooked, you're ready for the real treat: the lovely, lantern-lit, rock-framed *rotemburo* (outdoor bath) that's just outside. The water in this little pool is much more temperate and now that your muscles have been turned to loose string by the heat, you could sit here for hours, perhaps wandering occasionally to the cold bath a few steps away, just to keep yourself awake. Keep in mind that the sauna is off limits unless you pay an additional fee.

## KOMPARU-YU ONSEN Map p62

こんぱる湯

☎ 3571-5469; 8-7-5 Ginza, Chūō-ku; admission ¥400; 🕒 2pm-midnight Mon-Sat; 📍 Ginza or JR Yamanote Line to Shimbashi (exit 1)

The fact that this straightforward, Meiji-era bath manages to keep its wits about it, even as real estate prices continue to climb in the ritzy Ginza that surrounds it, must be one of Tokyo's best jokes. The bath mistress is a daunting battle-axe – no kidding, this gal chews tacks. With this in mind, make sure you scrub extra hard behind your ears, and don't even think about wearing the plastic slippers intended for the toilet out into the general locker room. That said, Komparu-yu is a refreshing slice of Shitamachi (low city)

in the midst of the city's most fashionable and well-to-do precincts.

## KOSHI-NO-YU SENTŌ Map pp96-7

腰の湯銭湯

☎ 3404-2610; 1-5-22 Azabu-Jūban, Minato-ku; admission ¥400; 🕒 11am-11pm Wed-Mon; 📍 Namboku or Toei Ōedo Line to Azabu-Jūban (exits 4 & 7)

This place is overseen by a no-nonsense bath mistress who watches the men's and women's sides closely for any serious bathing infractions or attempted voyeurism. Upstairs is the fancier *Azabu-Jūban Onsen* (¥1260), which uses the same tea-coloured, mineral-rich water piped from 500m underground, but also features a sauna, a cold bath and tatami rooms. If you're looking to hang out with the locals, however, the downstairs bathing area is really the thing.

## LA QUA SPA Map p56

ラクアスパ

☎ 5800-9999; www.tokyo-dome.co.jp/e/laqua/spa.htm; 1-3-61 Kōraku, Bunkyo-ku; entrance ¥2565, charge for Healing Baden ¥525; extra charge for late night bathing ¥1890; 🕒 11am-9am; 📍 Marunouchi Line to Kōrakuen, or JR Chūō or JR Sōbu Line to Suidōbashi (west exit)

One of the city's few true *onsen*, this unbelievably chic and sophisticated spa complex is where serious bathing aficionados go to indulge in a bit of class and luxury. With multiple floors boasting an incredible variety of baths, massage parlours, restaurants and relaxation areas, achieving beauty as well as peace of mind has never been easier. See [p58](#) for more information.

## Ō-EDO ONSEN MONOGATARI Map p131

大江戸温泉物語

☎ 5500-1126; 2-57 Aomi, Kōtō-ku; adult/child from ¥2800/1500, from 6pm-2am ¥1900/1500; 🕒 11am-9am; 📍 Yurikamome Line to Telecom Center (main exit) or Rinkai Line to Tokyo Teleport (free shuttle bus)

Ō-edo Onsen Monogatari does bill itself as an old Edo 'theme park', so come here for kitsch rather than authenticity. It's a good place to socialise in mixed groups, as there's an outdoor footbath area for relaxing in your *yukata* (light cotton robe). You wouldn't come here for a simple scrub, but if you'd like to make a day of it in Odaiba with some chums, this is a good place for an evening soak. See [p130](#) for more information.

## FEELING TONGUE-TIED?

Don't know your *sayonara* from your *sumimasen*? The following language schools can help you start speaking the Japanese language in no time:

**Academy of Language Arts** (Map p56; ☎ 3235-0071; www.ala-japan.com; 5th fl, 2-16-2 Agebachō, Shinjuku-ku; 📍 Namboku, Tōzai, Yūrakuchō or Toei Ōedo Line to Idabashi, exit B1)

**East West Japanese Language Institute** (off Map pp48-9; ☎ 3366-4717; www.eastwest.ac.jp; 2-36-9 Chūō, Nakano-ku; 📍 Marunouchi Line to Nakano-sakaue)

**Sendagaya Japanese Institute** (Map p122; ☎ 3232-6181; www.jp-sji.org; 7th fl, 1-31-18 Takadanobaba, Shinjuku-ku; 📍 JR Yamanote Line to Takadanobaba, main exit)

## ROKURYU KŌSEN Map p72

六龍鉱泉

☎ 3821-3826; 3-4-20 Ikenohata, Taitō-ku; admission ¥300; 🕒 3.30-11pm Tue-Sun; 📍 Chiyoda Line to Nezu (exit 2)

It may feel like a good neighbourhood *sentō*, but it's actually an *onsen* where the water is pleasantly hot, as opposed to scalding hot as it is at some other city hot springs. The bubbling amber water contains minerals that the many old timers who come here in the afternoon claim can cure a number of ailments. These same folk tell stories about the occasional ancient leaf that's worked its way up the pipes and into the tub. These leaves are in high demand and are reputed to be excellent for your skin. The bath is located down a small lane on the right; look for the traditional Japanese building with the blue curtains.

## RUNNING

While Tokyo's city streets are generally too crowded for jogging – though they do make an excellent obstacle course in that respect – there are parks aplenty for runners. Some of the best places to run, with lots of greenery and long paths, include *Yoyogi-kōen* ([p108](#)), *Meiji-jingū* ([p109](#)) and *Higashi-gyōen* ([p51](#)). If you prefer not to jog solo, and instead like it to be a social event, try 'hashing' with the Tokyo members of that famous drinking organisation with a running problem.

## HASH HOUSE HARRIERS

<http://tokyohash.org>

Formed in 1938, this worldwide club's activities are a mix of mad dashing and serious drinking done by cheeky joggers with sobriquets such as 'Sakura Sucker'. Several planned runs meander through a

variety of routes each week. Bring your best drinking shoes.

## CYCLING

Tooling around Tokyo on a bike can turn you onto some wonderful unexpected alleys and back streets, but you will have to sharpen your senses to avoid opening taxi doors and pedestrians suddenly veering into your path. The city is pretty flat, so most of the challenge will come from finding your way between points B and A. Some ryokan (traditional Japanese inns) rent or loan bicycles to their guests, and there are a few mellow cycling courses in the city parks. Be sure to always lock up your bike as theft does happen, even in a city as seemingly innocuous as Tokyo.

## EIGHT RENT Map p106

エイトレント

☎ 3462-2382; 31-16 Sakuragaokachō, Shibuya-ku; rentals per day ¥1920; 📍 JR Yamanote Line to Shibuya (south exit)

Near the south exit of Shibuya Station, this place requires a passport to rent a bicycle; call ahead for an appointment. It's a decent deal if you're renting for only one day, but if you plan to get around on a bike for the duration of your stay, you might be better off purchasing a cheap bike from Tōkyū Hands ([p142](#)) and selling it when you leave. Call ahead for an appointment.

## IMPERIAL PALACE CYCLING COURSE

Map pp52-3

皇居パレスサイクリングコース

☎ 3211-5020; 🕒 10am-3pm Sun; 📍 Chiyoda Line to Nijūbashimae (exit 2)

Every Sunday, 500 free bicycles are lent for use along the 3.3km Imperial Palace cycling

## THE GENTLE ART OF Ikebana

Fancy a hand at ikebana, the traditional Japanese art of flower-arranging? Schools to get you started:

**Ohara School of Ikebana** (小原流いけばな; International Division; [Map p110](#)); ☎ 5774-5097; [www.ohararyu.or.jp/english/class/index2.htm](#); 5-7-17 Minami-Aoyama, Minato-ku; ㊤ Chiyoda, Ginza or Hanzōmon Line to Omote-sandō, exits B1 & B3) Ohara specialises in flower-arranging classes for students of all levels. One-timers and short-term visitors are welcome, as are those who'd just like to watch.

**Sōgetsu Kaikan** (草月会館; [Map p92](#)); ☎ 3408-1151; [www.sogetsu.or.jp/english/index.html](#); Sōgetsu Kaikan Bldg, 7-2-21 Akasaka, Minato-ku; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 10am-8pm Fri; ㊤ Ginza, Hanzōmon or Toei Ōedo Line to Aoyama-itichōme, exit 4) An avant-garde ikebana school, with ikebana displays, a bookshop and coffee shop. Call ahead for class information. See [p93](#) for more information.

course. Bikes are given on a first-come, first-served basis and can be picked up next to the Babasakimon police box just outside the station exit.

## MEIJI-JINGŪ OUTER GARDENS

[Map p110](#)

明治神宮

☎ 3405-8753; ☎ 9am-4pm Sun & holidays; ㊤ Toei Ōedo Line to Kokuritsu-Kyōgijō (exit A2) On Sundays and holidays, 400 bicycles are lent to ride the road that encircles Meiji-jingū's outer gardens. Pick up these free bikes outside the office near the [National Stadium](#) ([Map p110](#)).

## GOLF

Golfers who live in Tokyo claim that it's cheaper to tee off in Hawaii because the entire trip costs less than booking a space at one of the 500 local courses. Sadly, they're probably right, though Tokyo does have 19 public golf courses that are somewhat reasonable (assuming you can get a spot). The most conveniently located of the public courses is listed below:

## TOKYO TOMIN GOLF COURSE

[off Map pp48-9](#)

東京都民ゴルフ場

☎ 3919-0111; 1-15-1 Shinden, Adachi-ku; admission from ¥5000; ㊤ Namboku Line to Shimo If you dream of sand traps and short puts, you'll want to consider giving this place a go. Some ability to speak Japanese will be useful when making a reservation, though most hotel staff can easily help you past this obstacle. Keep in mind that spring and autumn tend to be when the weather is fine and the course is often booked out weeks in advance.

## SKATING

What could be better on a sweltering summer afternoon than gliding around an icy, indoor skating rink? If you'd rather mentally score the double axels than execute them, the rinks sell 'observer' tickets (¥300 to ¥400) for those not taking to the ice.

## TAKADANOBABA CITIZEN ICE SKATE RINK

[Map pp48-9](#)

高田馬場シチズンアイススケートリンク

☎ 3371-0910; 4-29-27 Takadanobaba, Shinjuku-ku; adult/child ¥1300/800; ☎ noon-7.45pm Mon-Sat, 10am-7.45pm Sun; ㊤ JR Yamanote Line to Takadanobaba (Waseda exit)

The people's skating rink, a 30m by 60m slab of ice, is used for lessons, ice hockey, speed skating and general-purpose fun. Skate rental costs ¥500; discounts are taken off admission if you show up after 5pm. Head west out of Takadanobaba Station and walk about five minutes along Waseda-dōri; look for the big yellow sign to your left.

## MEIJI-JINGŪ ICE SKATING RINK

[Map p110](#)

明治神宮アイススケート場

☎ 3403-3458; Gobanchi, Kasumigaoka, Shinjuku-ku; adult/child ¥1300/900; ☎ noon-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-6pm Sat & Sun; ㊤ Toei Ōedo Line to Kokuritsu-Kyōgijō (exit A2) or JR Chūō or JR Sōbu Line to Sendagaya (main exit)

Open year-round, Meiji-jingū Ice Skating Rink is there for a good twirl and glide around the rink. When you arrive you'll be given a choice between three types of skates – ice hockey, speed skating and figure skating (rentals cost ¥500). Choose whichever will help you move most gracefully across the NHL-sized rink. Discounts on admission are offered after 3pm.

## GYMS & POOLS

In general, joining a Japanese gym is a cumbersome, expensive process best undertaken only by those who will be living in Tokyo. With that said, if you're here for the long run, we recommend it – most gyms have very good facilities and superb bathing areas that are especially tempting in winter. However, if you're just in the mood for a good swim or functional workout, the following spots should help you work up a good sweat. Most swimming pools require that swimmers wear bathing caps.

## CHIYODA SOGO TAIKUKAN POOL

[Map p68](#)

プリズトン美術館

☎ 3256-8444; [www.city.chiyoda.tokyo.jp/english/e-guide/sports.html](#); 2-1-8 Uchi-Kanda, Chiyoda-ku; pool/gym ¥600/350; ☎ 9am-9.30pm, closed 3rd Mon; ㊤ Chiyoda, Hanzōmon or Marunouchi Line to Ōtemachi (exits A1, A2, C1 & C2)

A public pool and weight room are available for reasonable fees. The pool is open to the public from 5pm to 9pm on most days, but hours vary. Keep in mind that certain times during the day are reserved for those residing in Chiyoda. The website lists details in English.

## CHŪŌ-KU SOGO SPORTS CENTRE

[Map p126](#)

中央区総合スポーツセンター

☎ 3666-1501; 2-59-1 Nihombashi-Hamachō, Chūō-ku; pool/gym ¥500/400; ☎ 9am-8.30pm; ㊤ Toei Shinjuku Line to Hamachō

Another of Tokyo's public gyms, this one in Chūō-ku has gym facilities and a swimming pool. *Kyūdo* (Japanese archery) practice also takes place at the sports centre; though no lessons are given, spectators are welcome to watch this graceful discipline if anyone is practising here.

## TOKYO METROPOLITAN GYMNASIUM INDOOR POOL

[Map p110](#)

東京体育館

☎ 5474-2111; 1-17-1 Sendagaya, Shibuya-ku; admission ¥450; ☎ 9am-8pm, closed 3rd Mon; ㊤ JR Sōbu Line to Sendagaya (main exit)

If all that movement on land has made you crave a few laps, head here. In addition to a pool there's a weights room, although its use requires an extra fee. The gymnasium and pool are located just to the northwest of the

National Stadium in Harajuku, just a few minutes' walk from the Sendagaya JR Station.

## YOGA

Although yoga is not as popular as it was a few years back, loyal devotees are still twisting and contorting themselves in the pursuit of peace of mind and strength of body. If you're looking to take part in classes, the city's largest school is listed below:

## INTERNATIONAL YOGA CENTER

[off Map pp48-9](#)

インターナショナルヨガセンター

☎ 090-4596-7996; [www.iyc.jp](#); 4th fl, 5-30-6 Ogikubo, Suginami-ku; sessions ¥3000; ㊤ Marunouchi Line to Ogikubo (south exit)

Drop in to do the downward dog at the International Yoga Center, which has branches across Tokyo. Ninety-minute classes in Ashtanga and Iyengar yoga are given in Japanese, but you can check the website for a list of English-speaking instructors and where and when they'll be teaching.

## WATCHING SPORT

From sumō and baseball to soccer and horse racing, the Tokyo's sports calendar is jam-packed full of exciting events year round.

## SUMŌ

Sumō is a fascinating, highly ritualised activity steeped in Shintō tradition. Perhaps sumō's continuing claim on the national imagination lies in its ancient origins and elaborate rites; it's the only traditional Japanese sport that still has enough clout to draw big crowds and dominate primetime TV.

When a tournament isn't in session, you can enjoy the [Sumō Museum](#) ([p125](#)), next door to the stadium. Displays include humungous wrestler hand-prints and the referees' ceremonial clothing. Unfortunately, there are no English explanations, and during tournaments the museum is open only to attending ticket-holders.

## RYŌGOKU KOKUGIKAN

[Map p126](#)

両国国技館  
☎ 3623 5111; [www.sumo.or.jp/eng/index.html](#); 1-3-28 Yokoami, Sumida-ku; admission ¥500-45,000; ☎ opening ceremonies 8.30am, ticket office 10am-6pm; ㊤ JR Sōbu or Toei Ōedo Lines to Ryōgoku

## ENGLISH CONVERSATION CAFÉS

An excellent way to meet Japanese people is to stop by an English conversation café, where you can chat with students looking to brush up their language skills. The following list should get you started:

**Com 'Inn** (コムイン; [Map p102](#); ☎ 3794-7366; www.cominn-jp.com; admission men/women ¥3000/2000 all-you-can-drink; 1-3-9 Minami-Ebisu, Shibuya-ku; ㊤ JR Ebisu, south exit) The longest-running and most established conversation café in Tokyo, Com 'Inn holds biweekly international parties on Saturday nights that pack the house.

**Leafcup** (リーフカップ; [Map p56](#); ☎ 5856-7587; www.leafcup.com; admission men/women ¥3000/2000 (all-you-can-drink); 4-2-6 lidabashi, Chiyoda-ku; ㊤ Tozai Line to lidabashi, exit A5; Nanboku, Yurakucho or Toei-Oedo lines to lidabashi, exit A4 or JR Yamanote Line to lidabashi, east exit) The most comfortable and attractive of the conversation cafés, Leafcup also holds biweekly international parties on Saturday nights that highlight different fun-filled themes.

**Mickey House** ([Map p122](#); 英会話喫茶 ミッキハウス; ☎ 3209-9686; www.mickeyhouse.jp; admission ¥500 (with 1 drink); 2-14-4 Takadanobaba, Shinjuku-ku; ㊤ Tozai Line to Takadanobaba, exit 6; JR Yamanote Line to Takadanobaba, Waseda Exit) An excellent place for a beer and light conversation most nights of the week, Mickey House really picks up on Friday and Saturday nights during international parties of their own.

Tokyo's *bashō* (sumō wrestling tournaments) take place at this stadium in January, May and September. Unless you're aiming for a big match at a weekend you should be able to secure a ticket: *bashō* take place over 15 days. The best seats are bought up by those in the know who also happen to have the right connections, but upstairs seats are usually available and cost from ¥2300 to ¥7000. Nonreserved seats at the back sell for ¥1500, and if you don't mind standing, you can get in for around ¥500. Tickets can be purchased up to a month prior to the tournament or you can simply turn up on the day of the match. It's advisable to get there early, as keen punters start queuing the night before. Note that only one ticket is sold per person, a clever device used to foil scalpers. The stadium is adjacent to JR Ryōgoku Station, on the north side of the railway tracks. If you can't go in person, NHK televises sumō from 3.30pm daily during tournaments.

## BASEBALL

Baseball is Japan's most popular sport and six of Japan's 12 pro-baseball teams are based in Tokyo. A trip to one of the local ballparks is truly a cultural (or perhaps a religious?) experience – the crowd behaviour is completely unlike what you're probably used to at home. The home team's fans often turn up in matching *happi* (half-length coats) and perform intricate cheering rituals in perfect unison led by special cheerleaders, one for each section, who make a job out of whipping fans into a

well-ordered frenzy. Sitting in the cheap seats will put you right in the middle of it.

Baseball season starts at the end of March or the first week of April and runs until October. Tokyo Dome is probably the most exciting place to take in a game, though Jingū Stadium can make for a fun afternoon out when the weather is fair.

See also the [Japanese Baseball Hall of Fame \(p59\)](#) for some history of the sport in Japan.

### JINGŪ BASEBALL STADIUM [Map p110](#)

神宮球場

Jingū Kyūjō; ☎ 3404-8999; 13 Kasumigaoka, Shinjuku-ku; tickets from ¥1500; ㊤ games start 6pm; ㊤ Ginza Line to Gaienmae (north exit)

Now home for the Yakult Swallows, Tokyo's number two team, Jingū Baseball Stadium was originally built to host the 1964 Olympics. When not hosting Yakult Swallows games, the baseball stadium is sometimes used for high-profile Little League and intercollegiate championships. You can buy tickets from the booth in front of the stadium; outfield tickets can cost as little as ¥1500.

### TOKYO DOME [Map p56](#)

東京ドーム

Big Egg; ☎ 5800-9999; www.tokyo-dome.co.jp/e; 1-3-61 Kōraku, Bunkyo-ku; admission from ¥1500; ㊤ JR Chūō or JR Sōbu Line to Suidōbashi (west exit)

The 'Big Egg', as it's affectionately known, is the best place to catch a baseball game in the city, as it's the home turf of Japan's most popular baseball team, the Yomiuri Giants. Night games tend to be well-

attended and can be especially exciting. There are ticket booths on three sides of the Big Egg; after purchasing your ticket, navigate to the gate you want.

## J-LEAGUE SOCCER

Japan was already soccer crazy when the World Cup came to Saitama and Yokohama in 2002. Now it's a chronic madness, and five minutes of conversation with any 10-year-old in Tokyo about why they wanna grow up to be like David Beckham should clear up any doubts you might have to the contrary. J-League games are generally played outside the city. If you'd like to catch an international match, try the National Stadium.

### NATIONAL STADIUM [Map p110](#)

国立競技場

Kokuritsu Kyōgijō; ☎ 3403-1151; Kasumi-gaokamachi, Shinjuku-ku; admission from ¥2000; ㊤ JR Chūō Line to Sendagaya (east exit)

Completed in 1958 and used as one of the primary venues for the 1964 Olympics, National Stadium now hosts the annual Toyota Cup (November or December) and other international soccer events.

## HORSE RACING

There are two big racing tracks in the Tokyo area, offering weekend gamblers a good chance to wager (and lose) some money. Gambling is illegal in Japan except in sanctioned contexts –

horse racing being one of them. If you're itching to take your chances, look up the Japan Racing Association's English guide online at <http://japanracing.jp>. Races are generally held at weekends from 11am to 4pm and are a hot destination for young couples on dates.

### ŌI KEIBAJŌ [Map p62](#)

大井競馬場

㊤ 3763-2151; 2-1-2 Katsushima, Shinagawa-ku; general admission ¥100, reserved seats ¥500-2000; ㊤ Tokyo Monorail to Ōi-Keibajōmae

Each year from April to October, Ōi Keibajō offers night-time 'Twinkle Races'. The races are lit by mercury lamps, whose diffused light draws young couples out on hot dates. Though the popularity of horse racing has declined over the past decade, some lucky record-breaker won over ¥13 million from a mere ¥100 bet here in May 2005.

### TOKYO KEIBAJŌ [off Map pp48-9](#)

東京競馬場

Fuchū Racecourse; ☎ 0423-633 141; 1-1 Hiyoshichō, Fuchū-shi; admission varies; ㊤ Keiō Line to Fuchūkeiba-Seimonmae (pedestrian overpass)

More popularly known as Fuchū Racecourse, Tokyo Keibajō's 500m-long home straight is the longest in the country and can make for exciting, win-by-a-nose finishes. This track is where most major and international races take place. Admission varies depending on the popularity of the event.

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