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## A NEW DAWN FOR TOKYO NIGHTS

BACK in the late 1980s, Tokyo Nights was a major hit for the Bee Gees. The years of the Japanese bubble economy prompted economists to predict that the 21st century would be a Nippon-dominated one. That fantasy has faded but the frenetic, trendy lifestyle born during that decade of excess has only intensified.

Easily the most fashionable city in Asia, Tokyo is the host city of the 2020 Summer Olympics and the Japanese capital is experiencing an unprecedented tourism boom. The dazzling nightlife, restaurant scene and fast-moving trends make other world cities look like they are on sedatives. Whether you want to experience one of the world's most interesting whisky tastings or fancy sipping on a cocktail while being handcuffed in a cell, there's no shortage of weird and wonderful experiences.

Japanese whiskies have become giant killers, beating their Scottish and American rivals in international competitions. Bar Zoetrope, an intimate barfly's haunt in Shinjuku, stocks more than 300 bottlings from Suntory to rare single-cask one-offs you won't find anywhere else. Whiskies sourced directly from distilleries throughout Japan are the magnets at Bar Kamo in Ginza but only those with deep wallets should order the elite selection of very rare spirits. The HQ of whisky giant Nikka is close to Aoyama Gakuin University, where the Blender's Bar in the basement stocks everything from everyday tipples to 17-year-old pure malts.

Tokyo has been a by-word for its luxury hotels for decades but a new page was turned in December 2014, with the launch of the Aman Tokyo, the luxury hotel group's first urban retreat. Located on the top six floors of Tokyo's new Otemachi Tower, the floor-to-ceiling windows are filled with views of the Imperial Palace Gardens and Mount Fuji. The 84 rooms and suites are the largest in the city and even the swimming pool, framed by gigantic pillars, ranks as a tourist attraction. Too exy at nearly \$1000 a night? The Shinjuku Granbell is a relatively new boutique property in one of the buzziest parts of the city, which offers style, good service and convenience

for reasonable rates. There's also a great bar on the 12th floor.

Another recent addition to the local accommodation scene is Caravan Tokyo in Aoyama, one of the city's most fashionable locales. Permanently parked inside the Commune 246 premises, the swish grey caravan was hand-made by local craftsmen. Equipped with all the mod cons, from airconditioning, a bathroom, plush bed, audio and wifi systems; book through Airbnb.com.

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Even Tokyo locals don't have a hope of getting a grip on the whole city sprawl. For first-time visitors and old hands, the thrill of gazing out on the tidal wave of flashing lights of Tokyo at night never palls. An army of bars claims to offer the best after-dark panorama but standout contenders are The Star Road bar at the Grand Pacific Le Daiba, The Peak Bar at the Park Hyatt and the Imperial Lounge Aqua of the iconic Imperial Hotel, designed in the 1920s by Frank Lloyd Wright.

The Japanese capita has more Michelin 3 Star restaurants than Paris - 12 compared to nine. A long-time fan of sushi, US President Obama dropped by at the triple stellar Sukiyabashi Jiro in Ginza which is booked out for weeks ahead. Ramen in all its guises seems to be the dish of the day at half of Tokyo's 100,000 restaurants. Hot Tip: Kikuya, which has been dishing up the noodles since 1952. Izakaya restaurants a.k.a Japanese tapas are having a real moment in Australia, especially in Sydney. The Asakusa district is home to the most traditional and authentic izakaya restaurants in Tokyo. The Japanese

eat out more often than not and a bad meal is tough to track down, even if you are reduced to pointing in a tiny hole-in-the-wall that only seats six.

Tokyo has 88,000 bars but some venues are worth a pilgrimage. Karaoke Kan in Shibuya gained fame as the venue where Bill Murray filmed the cringe-inducing singing scene in Lost In Translation. Lovenet in Roppongi has a variety of wacky booths and settings where drinkers can murder their favourite song - while submerged in a hot tub or in Heaven, where thousands of crystals sparkle from under a glass floor.

Professional wrestling buffs haunt Drop Kick in Shinjuku, where the regular crowd are major drinkers and watch re-runs of WWE and kickboxing bouts. Crime is minimal in Japan, which is why the idea of experiencing a night in the clink has wide appeal. Warders meet you at the door at The Lockup, also in Shibuya, clap on handcuffs and escort you to a cell. Blood-curdling screams echo in the corridors and the staff serve cocktails named after misdemeanours - Drug Addiction and Bad Loan.

Eaten too much or tired after too much touring? There's no need to head to rural areas to experience an onsen - the famous Japanese hot springs. LaQua in Tokyo Dome City sports hot spring pools, saunas, massage and beauty services.

Like any vast city, Tokyo is a series of 'hoods. Global fast fashion brands may have set up shop in Harajuku but it remains the capital of kei - the wacky tribes who change their fashion direction by the month. Hipster cafes, vintage menswear shops and more springboard major trends. Shibuya is the definitive 'hood for on-trend boutiques, bars, nightclubs and restaurants, from exy to dirt-cheap. It's also home to The Monocle Shop, where the luxe magazine's lifestyle comes to life.

Akihabara is an often-overwhelming homage to geekdom and gadgets. Ease yourself into the future with a visit to Yodobashi Camera Superstore - nine stories of the latest in hi-tech. If you're a keen gamer, the area also has the most game centres in Tokyo. 1