

City of artisans, merchants,  
and entertainment

Downtown  
Ueno

Shitaya & Okachimachi walking map

Hirokoji & Nakacho area  
Ameyoko & Okachimachi area  
Kachikura area

Old Tokyo Walking Guide No.5

English



Explore Ueno’s culture of craftsmanship, trading, and entertainment

The commoner district of downtown Ueno

Ueno Park’s hill is home to many cultural institutions established by government and religious organizations. In comparison, Ueno’s bustling downtown area was created by the energy of ordinary people who gathered at the foot of the hill. Today’s Nakacho entertainment district next to Ueno Hirokoji and Shinobazu Pond emerged from a once-thriving geisha district. Along the tracks south of Ueno Station is the sprawling Ameyoko market and ethnic communities that grew from a postwar black market. And stretching to towards the Sumida River in the east is a district that has been home to craftsmen since the Edo Period and now attracts young artisans and designers. This guidebook introduces the history of downtown Ueno’s artisan, trading, and entertainment culture.

Cover image: “One Hundred Famous Views of Edo: Shitaya Hirokoji,” Utagawa Hiroshige, 1856. Edo-era Ueno and Okachimachi were always bustling with visitors to Kan’ei-ji Temple.



Downtown Ueno route

Wander from Ueno’s entertainment and market district to Tokyo’s artisan center

Beginning at the foot of Ueno Hill and heading east, we can see how this area’s commerce has changed from Edo to the present day. Nakacho traces its roots to an Edo-era geisha district, while across Ueno Hirokoji, the Ameyoko Market still retains the vitality of Ueno’s postwar black market. The neighborhood stretching from here to Kuramae along the Sumida River in the east is home to a rich culture of craftsmanship and new creative energy. Head north towards Asakusa to pass through old craftsmen areas, or south towards Kuramae to find new shops run by young artisans. Choose you own path between this area’s diverse cultural heritage of artisanship, trading, and entertainment.

Major stations near downtown Ueno

- Ueno Station (JR Yamanote Line, Keihin Tohoku Line, Joban Line, Tokyo Metro Ginza Line, Hibiya Line)
- Ueno Okachimachi Station (Toei Oedo Line)
- Okachimachi Station (JR Yamanote Line, Keihin Tohoku Line)
- Asakusabashi Station (JR Sobu Line, Toei Asakusa Line)
- Tawaramachi Station (Tokyo Metro Ginza Line)

Major festivals

Mid-May  
Please check the Internet for specific dates.  
Shitaya Shrine

Shitaya Shrine Grand Festival

The earliest summer festival in Taito Ward takes place in mid-May. As many as 7,000 people participate in the parade around the neighborhood, while spectators can enjoy street food.  
<http://shitayajinja.or.jp/>



End of May  
Southern Taito Ward

Monomachi

Kachikura’s artisan culture is on display during this three-day event held since 2011. Visitors can learn about the creative work of craftsmen around the neighborhood.  
<http://monomachi.com/>

Beginning of June  
Torigoe Shrine

Torigoe Shrine Grand Festival

This festival has a history dating back 1,360 years, and the four-ton *omikoshi* portable shrine is the heaviest in Tokyo. Tens of thousands come to watch it be carried through the neighborhood.

July-August  
Around Ueno Station, Shinobazu Pond & Ueno Hirokoji

Ueno Summer Festival Parade

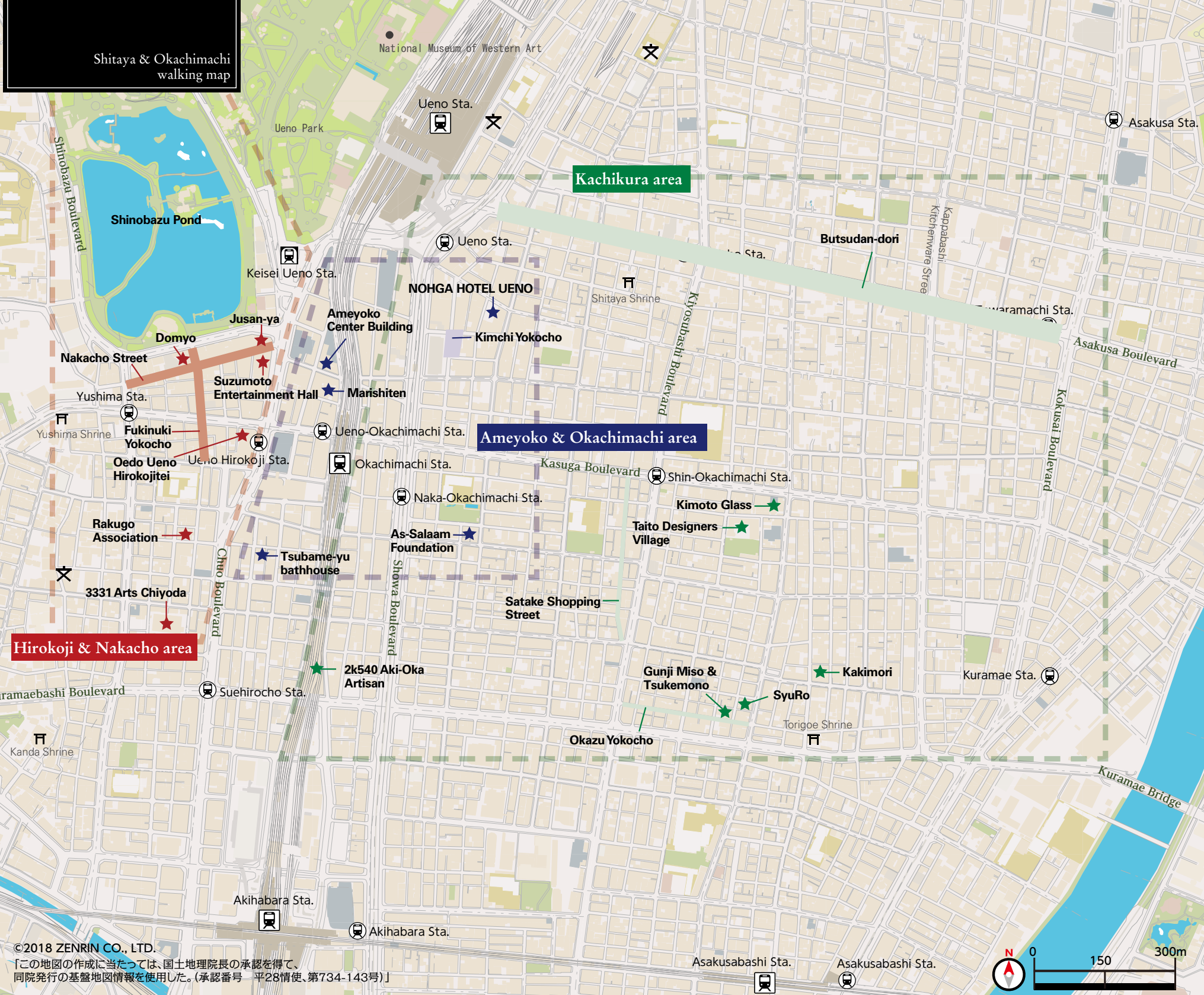
This festival is more than three decades old and features numerous events in the area. The parade along Ueno Chuo Boulevard is the highlight.  
<http://www.ueno.or.jp/parade/>

Around December 29-31  
Ameyoko

End of Year Shopping

The end of the year is the busiest season at the Ameyoko market, when as many as half a million customers per day come to buy food for New Years meals.

Downtown  
Ueno  
map



Locations introduced  
in this guide

Hirokoji & Nakacho area

- Suzumoto Entertainment Hall  
(2-7-12 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Oedo Ueno Hirokojitei (1-20-10 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Rakugo Association (Kuromonte)  
(1-9-5 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Nakacho Street (2 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Fukinuki Yokocho  
(2 Ueno, Taito Ward to 3 Yushima, Bunkyo Ward)
- Domyo (2-11-1 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Jusan-ya (2-12-21 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- 3331 Arts Chiyoda (6-11-14 Sotokanda, Chiyoda Ward)
- Shinobazu Pond (3 Ueno Koen Ikenohata, Taito Ward)

Ameyoko & Okachimachi area

- Marishiten (4-6-2 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Ameyoko Center Building (4-7-8 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Kimchi Yokocho (Higashi Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Tsubame-yu bathhouse (3-14-5 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- As-Salaam Foundation (4-6-7 Taito, Taito Ward)

Kachikura area

- Satake Shopping Street (Taito, Taito Ward)
- Butsudan-dori (Taito Ward)
- Okazu Yokocho (1 Torigoe, Taito Ward)
- Taito Designers Village (2-9-10 Kojima, Taito Ward)
- 2k540 Aki-Oka Artisan (5-9 Ueno, Taito Ward)
- Kimoto Glass (2-18-17 Kojima, Taito Ward)
- SyuRo (1-16-5 Torigoe, Taito Ward)
- Gunji Miso & Tsukemono  
(1-14-2 Torigoe, Taito Ward)
- Kakimori (1-6-2 Misuji, Taito Ward)

“Old Tokyo” Walking Guide #5: City of Artisans, Merchants, and Entertainment: Downtown Ueno

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Explore Old Tokyo

The Tokyo Cultural Heritage Alliance

The Tokyo Cultural Heritage Alliance (TCHA) brings together business, academic, and government bodies to promote the rich and varied cultural heritage located in north-central Tokyo (“Old Tokyo”) and bring new cultural vitality to the area (launched in April 2015). This pamphlet was produced as part of a series to introduce visitors to a unique route that ties together the area’s varied cultural heritage.

“Old Tokyo” Walking Guide Series

#1: Yushima area walking map: Explore the spiritual culture of Old Tokyo/Published 1 April 2017

#2: Edo-Tokyo’s Information Crossroads: “Greater Akiba” Akihabara, Kanda, and Jimbocho/Published July 25, 2018

#3: Edo-Tokyo, City of water & culture: Ueno, Hongo and Korakuen/Published August 25, 2018

#4: Let’s play! How modern sports came to Tokyo: Kanda, Imperial Palace, & Korakuen/Published September 25, 2018

Explore Ueno’s past and present culture of craftsmanship, trading, and entertainment

The downtown areas south and east of Ueno Park are home to commoner culture from many eras.



“Famous Views of Edo: Niōmon Gate in Ueno.” The area around the Mihashi bridges (visible in the lower part of the frame) was a major pleasure district in Edo, filled with restaurants and shops. Kan’ei-ji can be seen in the distance.

1

Ueno’s main street: Hirokoji

►Shitaya thrives as the entrance to Kan’ei-ji Temple

The area at the foot of Ueno Hill, once known as Shitaya, first flourished thanks to its location in front of Kan’ei-ji Temple. Kan’ei-ji was founded atop Ueno Hill by the powerful Buddhist monk Tenkai in 1625 to safeguard the Tokugawa Shogun’s city and ensure the peace of common people. Tenkai turned the temple grounds into a beautiful space for Edo residents to relax, planting cherry blossoms on the hill, and designing the area around Shinobazu Pond to resemble famous landmarks in and around Kyoto. Kan’ei-ji became one of Edo’s most famous spots, and the town outside the gates grew busy with many temple visitors.

►An Edo business district full of sightseers and merchants

The wide street from the entrance of Ueno Park to the

Matsuzakaya Department Store is known as Hirokoji, or “broadway,” and was created as a firebreak after a major fire destroyed the city in 1657. Hirokoji formed part of a major road that served as the route linking Edo Castle to Kan’ei-ji, and became lined with restaurants and stores selling food and other goods. Until the end of the 19th century, the small Shinobu River flowed across Hirokoji near the intersection of Shinobazu Boulevard, where the three “Mihashi” bridges led to the entrance to Kan’ei-ji. Hirokoji is pictured in many Edo period prints as a bustling district filled with temple visitors, merchants, and shoppers.

2

The former geisha district of Nakacho

►Edo pleasure district at Shinobazu Pond

The area south of Shinobazu Pond, known as Nakacho, also dates back to the Edo Period. Today one of Ueno’s largest entertainment districts, Nakacho traces its roots back to an Edo-era pleasure quarter. Visitors to Kan’ei-ji and Yushima Shrine flocked to tea houses set up along the pond, which became a preferred spot for romantic rendezvous. By the early 20th century, Nakacho was home to many permanent establishments and was known as one of Tokyo’s major geisha districts. At its peak in the 1920s, it attracted students, merchants, craftsmen, nobles, and others, before the geisha houses made way for cabarets and clubs after World War II.

►Edo-era stores and restaurants

Nakacho is still home to numerous Edo-era establishments. The geisha district and nearby temples and shrines created demand for craftsmen including Domyo, which has made



“Edo kōmei kaitei zukushi—Shitaya Hirokoji.” The view of Shinobazu Pond attracted many sightseers to the restaurants and teahouses of Ueno.



Part of the “Edo-zu Byobu,” 17th century, in the collection of the National Museum of Japanese History. Tea houses along the shore of Shinobazu Pond were a popular meeting spot for Edo lovers.

and sold *kumihimo* braided cords for generations, and wooden comb maker Jusanya. Restaurants such as unagi shop Izuei and soba restaurant Rengyokuan have also been in business since the Edo Period. In recent years, Nakacho’s many nightclubs and other entertainment spots have been changing into new bars and restaurants, as the area goes through another period of transition.

3

Ameyoko’s black market roots

►Outdoor market sparks Ueno’s postwar recovery

Across Hirokoji from Nakacho, Ueno’s symbolic shopping street Ameyoko teems with customers at all hours. This area was densely filled with housing until the war. After Ueno was reduced to ashes in 1945, the city began anew amid the ruins. Faced with shortages of food and materials, people gathered at black markets around major stations such as Shimbashi, Shinjuku and Shibuya. A large outdoor market also appeared on a triangular patch of land south of Ueno Station. Here buyers and sellers came from all sections of Tokyo society, including many ethnic Koreans, Taiwanese, and Chinese, as well as Japanese repatriated from overseas.

►Once a market, always a market

By a year after the surrender, Ueno’s outdoor market had expanded into a lane of some 80 wooden buildings stretching along the rail line towards Okachimachi Station to the south. The name “Ame-ya Yokocho” is said to come from the many shops that sold “imo-ame” sugar-coated



The outdoor stalls that appeared around Ueno Station after the defeat were the origin of today’s Ameyoko market.

potatoes that were one of the few sweets available. Also from 1947 until the Korean War, more shops appeared that sold fountain pens, clothing, tobacco, chocolate, and goods brought from the American military department stores or snuck into Japan from abroad, earning the market the nickname “America Yokocho.” Many of modern Tokyo’s business centers trace back to postwar black markets, but Ameyoko is the largest that still retains its original outdoor appearance and functions as a market. Its goods have changed over the years, with more than 400 shops now hawking clothes, fruit, jewelry, and Asian groceries, alongside casual izakaya and ethnic restaurants.

4

Entryway from Tohoku and Asia

►Ueno fuels Tokyo’s postwar growth

One of the reasons Ameyoko grew so quickly was its proximity to Ueno Station, to which many trains arrived from the farmland north of the city. Ever since the station opened in 1883, Ueno was known as the “gateway of the north,” and carried a constant flow of people into the city. In particular, after the war until the 1960s, great numbers of migrants from the northern Tohoku region passed through Ueno. Many of these new residents settled in northeast Tokyo, which still has a strong connection to Tohoku today.

►Asian ethnic town

Today, Ueno is better known as an entryway for people from overseas, not only tourists arriving from Narita

Airport, but also many Asian and other foreign migrants who live in the area. Ueno’s ethnic diversity can be smelled in the food market in the basement of the Ameyoko Center Building, where shops sell ingredients from across Asia, and seen and heard in the ethnic restaurants, mosque, and streets around Okachimachi. Eastern Ueno is also home to one of the city’s oldest Korean towns, known as “Kimchi Yokocho,” established by ethnic Koreans who were forced to move from Ameyoko in 1948.

5

Center of artisan and design culture

►Kachikura’s roots as a craftsmen district

“Kachi-kura” refers to a roughly 1.5-kilometer wide area stretching from Okachimachi to Kuramae. Now known as a trendy center for design and artisan products, let’s look at the history of how this area developed.



“100 Famous Views of Edo: Oumayagashi on the Asakusa River,” Utagawa Hiroshige, 1856. View of Kuramae shows the rice warehouses along the Sumida River, before the area developed as a craftsmen and wholesale district in the 20th century.

In the Edo Period, Okachimachi’s proximity to numerous temples and shrines and the geisha district near Shinobazu Pond created demand for metal workers and craftsmen who manufactured items such as Shinto and Buddhist amulets, hairpins, combs, sword sheaths, and parasols. The area from Torigoe to Kuramae was home to feudal estates and the shogun’s rice warehouses until the late 19th century, but by the early 20th century leather craftsmen and textile artisans began moving in from the Muromachi area of Nihombashi. In the mid-20th century Torigoe and Kuramae increasingly became home to craftsmen and wholesale companies, but some of these businesses began to close after the 1990s, leaving behind empty buildings. In 2004, the Taito Designers Village opened to support fashion and design entrepreneurs, many of whom opened stores in renovated spaces in the area, reviving Kachikura’s image as a center of manufacturing and craftsmanship. Events such as Monomachi put the area’s artisans front and center in this changing neighborhood.



Taito Designers Village occupies a renovated elementary school.



Entertainment district in an Edo-era geisha quarter

# Ueno Hirokoji & Nakacho area

Entertainment and commerce has flourished around Hirokoji and Nakacho since the Edo Period. The rakugo comedy shows enjoyed by Edo commoners still take place here, while the alluring alleyways below Yushima Shrine and along Nakacho Street remain popular spots for late-night revelry. The area is also home to Edo-era artisan businesses such as Domyo and new arts and crafts culture including 3331 Arts Chiyoda.

## Spot1 Rakugo

Ueno is home to several places featuring rakugo, a form of traditional comedic entertainment. The history of the Suzumoto Entertainment Hall is long, dating back to the Honmoku-tei that opened along the Hirokoji in 1857. It



The entrance to the Suzumoto theater, a venue for popular rakugo performances.



Colorful braided cords are displayed inside Domyo. New products include neckties.

survived the earthquake and war, and rakugo performances remain its main attraction. In contrast, the Oedo Ueno Hirokoji-tei opened relatively recently in 1996, hosting not only rakugo but also kodan, gidayu, and other traditional performing arts and comedy performances. The nearby Kuromon-tei also hosts weekend rakugo performances.

## Spot2 Streets & alleyways

The Nakacho area is home to many alluring alleyways.



Nakacho comes alive after dark, with neon signs typical of Tokyo entertainment districts.

Nakacho Street was the main east-west road through the area until Kasuga Boulevard was built in the Meiji Period. Today it is still lined by a variety of shops, and is the nighttime heart of the neighborhood. Fukinuki Yokocho runs from Shinobazu Pond in the north to Suehirocho in the south, and also earned the name “fifth drink street,” because even after five drinks, the breeze blowing from the pond will sober you up.

## Spot3 Old geisha district shops

Nakacho is also home to several old shops that flourished in the Edo-era geisha district. Domyo was founded in 1652, making it one of the city’s oldest businesses, and its craftsmen continue practice its traditional methods of braiding today. Jusan-ya, a small shop along Shinobazu Boulevard, opened in 1736 and has been carving combs from boxwood for fifteen generations.

## Spot4 3331 Arts Chiyoda

This arts and culture center opened in 2010 in the renovated building of Rensei Middle School. In addition to galleries, offices, a cafe, and other functions occupy many of the former school classrooms. Visitors can relax on the grassy plaza in front of the building, while the free space on the first floor is a popular spot for local residents and families.



People can always be found relaxing in front of 3331 Arts Chiyoda.

## Spot5 Shinobazu Pond

Generations of ordinary people have enjoyed Shinobazu Pond’s open space and waterfront, one of Tokyo’s best. When the Buddhist monk Tenkai established Kan’ei-ji, he landscaped the pond in the image of Lake Biwa near Kyoto, including erecting Bentendo on a central island. Later, it was the site of the Battle of Ueno when Edo became Tokyo. The new government made the pond part of Ueno Park, and used it to host horse racing and expositions. Today a favored spot for Tokyoites to relax.



The August peak of lotuses at Shinobazu Pond. Bentendo can be seen in the distance.

Shopping district born from a black market

# Ameyoko & Okachimachi area

The Ameyoko area traces its roots to the postwar market that formed as repatriated soldiers, porters from the surrounding farming communities, ethnic Koreans and others gathered south of Ueno Station. Okachimachi has a long history of commerce, including famed department stores Matsuzakaya, Takeiya, and Akafudado. To the north, Ueno Station has long been an entryway for migrants and visitors from the northeast and overseas.

## Spot1 Marishiten (Tokudaiji Temple)

At the heart of Ameyoko’s bustle, Tokudaiji Temple stands atop the postwar sweets shop Niki no Kashi. The temple is dedicated to Marici (Marishiten) and was founded in the mid-17th century, earning popularity among commoners as a place to pray for success and avoiding bad fortune. An unchanging presence over the decades, the temple’s bell can be widely heard at noon and 6 PM.



Marishiten is a tranquil spot amid the energy of Ameyoko.



Entrance to Ameyoko, always bustling with shoppers.

## Spot2 Tsubame-yu Bathhouse

Bathhouses were crucial spaces to the communities of new migrants who poured into Ueno in the 20th century. Tsubame-yu, a registered historic landmark, takes its name from the northern city of Tsubame, Niigata, and is known as one of the few bathhouses in Tokyo that has morning baths—always a very hot 45 degrees or more.



Tsubame-yu reflects typical bathhouse architecture from the mid-20th century.

## Spot3 Ameyoko Center Building Underground Food Market

The Ameyoko Center Building stands on the site where Ueno’s black market first began. Head downstairs to find a hidden world of herbs, spices, vegetables, and rare fish and meat from around Asia. The rich smells and crowded aisles could easily be mistaken for Bangkok or Hong Kong.



“Kimchi Yokocho” is home to vendors of kimchi, meat, and other Korean foods.

## Spot4 Kimchi Yokocho

Shin-Okubo and Akasaka are Tokyo’s best known Korean towns, but the area between Ueno and Nippori is said to be the oldest, dating to just after the war. The “Kimchi Yokocho” began as an offshoot of the market where Ameyoko is today, and is still home to Korean restaurants and food vendors.

## Spot5 As-Salaam Foundation

This mosque stands just a few minutes from Okachimachi Station. Completed in 2011, the first floor contains a community center and the upper floors prayer rooms. As one of Tokyo’s few mosques, it supports not just the local community, but also muslim visitors to Tokyo. In recent years, nearby yakiniku, ramen, and sushi restaurants have gained halal certification, as the area changes to accommodate the growing foreign population.



Prayers take place at the As-Salaam Foundation five times per day.



Food ingredients from across Asia fill the hidden underground market.



Artisan town mixing tradition  
and the cutting-edge

# Kachikura area

Today Kachikura is flourishing thanks to new designers and local events such as monomachi, renovated buildings and new cafes. However, this area has long been home to craftsmen and wholesalers. Shops on “Butsudan-dori” street have been selling Buddhist altars for hundreds of years, while many of the design shops around the Taito Designers Village and in 2k540 Aki-Oka Artisan give visitors a chance to enjoy the cutting edge of Tokyo craftsmanship.



Locals are out in the greatest numbers in the afternoon and evening.

## Spot1 Satake Shopping Street

This 330-meter long shopping street stretches from Kasuga Boulevard south to Kiyosubashi Boulevard. The shopping street dates back to the late 19th century, when it was a busy area filled with shops and local theaters. The shops banded together after the Great Kanto Earthquake to rebuild. Said to be the second-oldest shopping street in Japan and the oldest in Tokyo, today Satake has also become infused with ethnic influences.

## Spot2 Butsudan-dori

Butsudan-dori is lined on the south side by some 50 stores selling Buddhist altars and goods. No other areas have such



Old wholesalers and narrow office buildings are typical in Kuramae today.



An area of Buddhist altar shops.

a concentration of Buddhist altar shops, while other shops also sell incense, statues, and Shinto altars. Most are located on the south side of the street to avoid direct exposure to sunlight. The stores clustered on the street between Kan’ei-ji in Ueno and Senso-ji Temple in Asakusa to the east. Butsudan-dōri also intersects with the Kappabashi Shopping Street, famed for kitchenware, forming a route of old artisan culture between Ueno and Asakusa.

## Spot3 Okazu Yokocho

Okazu Yokocho (“snack alley”) is home to some 60 shops along a 230-meter long east-west street. Delis and dry goods shops that were scattered around the area in the early 20th century moved to the street after the 1923 earthquake, with some of the shops more than 100 years old. The street got its name as the go-to place for craftsmen in the area’s workshops to have a quick bite to eat.



Okazu Yokocho bustles during the period of the Monomachi festival.

## Spot4 Taito Designers Village area

This facility devoted to supporting designers and creative entrepreneurs makes use of a renovated elementary school. Although typically closed to the public, events during the Monomachi festival offer the chance to interact with artisans. Many designers and craftsmen who have finished the program have opened shops in the area, such as the stationary store Kakimori. Old-time craftsmen such as Kimoto Glass, which has been in the area for decades, also host events. Unique shops and studios are scattered throughout the area around the Designers Village and in Torigoe and Kuramae.

## Spot5 2k540 Aki-Oka Artisan

Below the tracks between Akihabara and Okachimachi stations, this shopping center brings together workshops

and stores selling handmade goods. 2k540 refers to the site’s 2.540 km distance from Tokyo Station. Some 50 shops fill the unusual space, many of which also include workshops where customers can observe the manufacturing process of products.



Dozens of small artisan shops fill the space under the JR Yamanote Line tracks.

# Explore more of Kachikura’s artisan culture

## Kimoto Glass

Kimoto has produced glass tableware since 1931, carrying on the Edo-kiriko technique of cut glass. The store is run by an innovative glassware producer who partners with designers and creators from different backgrounds to “preserve and evolve tradition.”

Address: 2-18-17 Kojima, Taito Ward  
Phone: 03-3851-9668



## SyuRo

Opened in 2008, this design goods shop carries select tableware and other original products for everyday life. Director Masuko Unayama is a graduate of the Taito Designers Village. The store is housed in a distinctive former workshop space.

Address: 1-16-5 Torigoe, Taito Ward  
Phone: 03-3861-0675



## Gunji Miso & Tsukemono

Founded in 1957, this shop facing Okazu Yokocho sells miso and tsukemono pickles. The owner insists on selling naturally fermented miso, sourced from producers across the country.

Address: 1-14-2 Torigoe, Taito Ward  
Phone: 03-3851-1783



## Kakimori

Opened in 2010, this unique stationary store sells order-made notebooks, original refillable ballpoint and fountain pens, vibrant colored ink, and other goods for “writing enjoyably.”

Address: 1-6-2 Misuji, Taito Ward  
Phone: 050-1744-8546



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**WEB:** <https://nohgaotel.com/ueno>

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## The Tokyo Cultural Heritage Alliance is pursuing a vision for “Ueno Square”

### About Ueno Square

Squares are urban crossroads that bring together different people. At the heart of Old Tokyo lies Ueno, home of many art museums and other cultural institutions.

We are crafting a future vision to enliven the area south of Ueno Park, where various cultural heritage and resources can be found around Shinobazu Pond, Yushima Shrine, Hirokoji, and 3331 Arts Chiyoda. The “Ueno Square” project seeks to make this neighborhood into the hub of Old Tokyo, where diverse cultures intersect, meet, and grow.

